

13. MY EXPERIENCE WITH TONGUES

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In this article I am going to talk about my own experience with “tongues”. I do so reluctantly. But I feel compelled to do so. In the process we are going to ask the question, *What’s really going on* when people speak with “the tongues of angels”? But before we do, I want to say something extremely important.

TONGUES HAS A HISTORY OF CAUSING DIVISION IN THE CHURCH

Sincere Bible-believers are divided on this question. Some are ambivalent. For them, as long as the ones who claim this gift are not causing strife and not pushing their “tongues” on others, then that’s okay. It’s between themselves and God. It’s just a private matter. No harm done.

Others are enthusiastically in favour, either because they themselves practice the gift or because they know others who do. And they sincerely believe they are following the Spirit’s instructions and enjoying God’s anointing power in the matter, and they are able to quote verse and chapter, proof text, in support.

Then there are those who look upon the practice as being downright dangerous. In the extremes of this camp are those who see everybody who speaks in “tongues” as deceived, possibly, if not probably, opening the door to mysticism, and even the demonic.

There is no doubt this is a polarising question. Indeed, since beginning to write this little series I have received correspondence from representatives of all of these various approaches, and all shades in-between. For some reason the Corinthian catastrophe --- where the least of the gifts was highly sought after as a badge of spirituality --- continues to repeat itself and yes, sadly, still causes strife and disunity amongst God’s people.

Now, before we look at what is really going on, I need to repeat something which I have a number of times said most sincerely. By far and away the huge majority of “charismatics” who believe in the relevance and necessity of all the gifts of the Spirit are in my experience, some of the most genuine and on-fire Christians I have met.

Without exception, they love the Bible, believing it to be the inspired “word of God’. They hold to the fundamentals of the Faith. They believe in the inspiration of the holy Scriptures. They believe in the virgin-born Son of God. They believe in the atoning power of the blood of Calvary. They believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus. They believe he is returning to establish God’s kingdom and to judge the living and the dead.

In the meantime they serve the Lord whole-heartedly, and to the best of their knowledge, they endeavour to follow his teachings and to live holy and dedicated lives. They are prepared to sacrifice and to suffer for Jesus Christ and his Gospel. They certainly have a passion to share the Gospel with the “lost”. They gladly confess Christ and, I have no doubt

that, on that great Day our Lord Jesus Christ will own them before his Father and the angels and they shall enter his everlasting kingdom.

WILDFIRE, NO FIRE, STRANGE FIRE!

And to be honest, I'd rather be in the company of people who believe in the fullness of the holy Spirit and who exhibit a little "wild fire" than those who have no fire in their belly for the things of God! However, the Biblical ideal is that we have zeal *with* knowledge, passion guided by sound doctrine. Misguided enthusiasm unmoored to sound doctrine is no better than dead orthodoxy.

But we do not want any "strange fire", either. The only way to honour the one who said he is the Truth who leads to the Father, is to listen to --- i.e. obey --- his word. All other foundations sit on eroding sand and will not stand the test of God's eternity.

EARLY SIGNS OF TROUBLE IN THE MODERN PENTECOSTAL MOVEMENT

In a previous article I gave a little of the history of the early Pentecostal movement (around the late 1800's to the early Twentieth Century) where a gift of miraculous languages for proclaiming the Good news of Jesus Christ was in evidence in a *very few* and in *very limited* situations. This was verified by linguists and is reliably recorded, I believe.

Indeed, those earliest of Pentecostals only sought the gift for that reason, to the best of my understanding. Only as time progressed and it became obvious they did not have the permanent supernatural ability to communicate in those "new tongues" on the foreign mission fields, did the doctrine of praying in "heavenly prayer tongues" evolve in order to justify the phenomenon --- and to rescue the disappointed, disillusioned, and yes, even the shattered faith of the practitioners.

It did not take long for signs of deception and trouble to emerge right from those earliest days. For instance, **William J. Seymour** was an African-American preacher who became increasingly alarmed at some of the wild happenings at his meetings. So he sent **urgent letters appealing for help, as spiritualistic manifestations, hypnotic forces and fleshly contortions ... had broken loose in the meeting(s).** He wanted **Charles Parham to come quickly to help him discern between that which was real and that which was false. (¹)**

Seymour testified that he found various influences controlling folks who spoke in "tongues". He talked about fanaticism with hypnotic influences, familiar-spirit influences (which is to say, demonic manifestations), spiritualistic and mesomeric influences, and **all kinds of spells, spasms, falling trances, etc. ... There is a jabbering here that is not tongues at all. The Holy ghost does nothing that is unnatural or unseemingly, and the strained exertion of body, mind or voice is not the work of the Holy Spirit, but of some familiar spirit, or other influence. The Holy Ghost never leads us beyond the point of self-control or**

¹ Mrs, Charles Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham*, Commercial Printing Co., 1930 Birmingham, AL., 59,74 as recorded in *God's Generals: Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed*, by Roberts Liardon, Albury Publishing, 1996, p 126

the control of others, while familiar spirits or fanaticism lead us both beyond self-control and the power to help others. (²)

That *something* is going on in the modern tongues movement nobody will deny. But what is that something? This is especially pressing once we consider that “the gift of languages” was given as a sign to both warn and invite the unbelieving Jew to believe the Gospel of their Messiah and Lord Jesus, and that the modern approach has virtually nothing at all to do with this. Consider a number of possibilities.

SOME ARE SELF-INDUCED BABBLINGS

In the field of modern psychology it is an accepted fact that folk may be *carried away* into a self-hypnotic state where “babbling” results. (Remember where the apostle Paul used that very expression, **carried away** in **I Cor. 12: 2?**) “Group settings” where trance-like states are practised and where all barriers to self-consciousness are dismissed, are observed to be particularly productive of such observable psychological phenomenon.

In the days when Paul wrote his epistle to the Corinthians, *glossolalia* were practised amongst various Mediterranean pagan cults in the Graeco-Roman world of the First Century. Corinth was known to be a hot-spot for such cultic ecstatic utterances. Today it is not unknown amongst some Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Mormon, J.W. and other non-Christian settings.

Smith Wigglesworth was one of the early esteemed pioneers of Pentecostalism. He actively taught that “tongues” are **the doorway to the supernatural; Praying in other tongues will birth the will of God in your spirit. You will no longer depend on your intellect or the direction of others. You will “know” for yourself what the will of the Father is for your life. Sometimes we are limited in our prayer life by our national language, and don’t always know how to pray for a situation. The Word tells us that “praying in the spirit,” or in tongues, enables us to pray the perfect will of God into every situation because praying in tongues mooves us into the realm of the Spirit ...**

If you haven’t experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of other tongues, then earnestly seek God for this. Speaking in “other tongues” is not just “for some.” It is for *everyone*, just like salvation. When you choose to enter into this measure of God’s fullness, your life will never be the same. (³)

“Tongues” is for everyone, just like salvation!?! Tongues are for you! Tongues **will birth the will of God in your spirit.** If you don’t receive this gift, you have not been “baptised in the Holy Spirit”, you are in effect, a second-class citizen of the kingdom. (⁴)

² Ibid. p 158

³ Roberts Liardon, *God’s Generals: Why They Succeeded and Why Some Failed*, Albury Publishing, 9th Printing, 1996, p121

⁴ By now we should be able to spot the unbiblical and false teaching of Wigglesworth’s contradictions to the holy Scriptures! Here’s one for starters: **I Cor. 12: 28-30** teaches that not all spoke with tongues even in the days of the apostles! Oh, here’s another: You will no longer need the handicap of your God-given mind and understanding!?

When revered teachers like **Smith Wigglesworth** teach such things, it's easy to see the pressure that sincere souls come under.

And who can discount the power of self-hypnosis under such teaching? "Groupthink" can be very persuasive. Earnest souls have been led into trance-like states by the repetitions of their coaches: "Just close your eyes. Let your mind run blank. Open your mouth and utter the first syllables that bubble up. As we lay our hands on you, you will have a strange sensation. Unformed words will erupt. Let the Spirit flow."

Such babbling may not necessarily do any harm, but it does not qualify as the "gift of tongues" for, as we have seen, "tongues" in the Bible are supernaturally given languages with grammar and syntax that carry intelligible signification (**Acts 2:8; I Cor. 14: 7-10**). Inspired "tongues" meeting the genuine Bible test always communicated prophetic content.

Once these evident Bible facts are set forth, charismatic folk who have been "talked into" their experience will often carry severe internal doubts as to the genuineness of the "gift". They wonder if they might have been self-hypnotised, or even deceived.

Once the subconscious takes over, and once all self-control is handed over, and once emotionalism runs rampant, *glossolalia* may bubble forth. The best we can say in such cases is that their "tongues" are of the flesh, purely a psychological event.

STONES FOR BREAD AND SNAKES FOR FISH

Many charismatic Christians have told me that, at first when they sought the gift of tongues they were unsure about it all. Certain doubts about the genuineness of what they experienced came over them. Trying to push back feelings of unease, they even wondered whether Satan may have come in with the experience of their ecstatic utterings. However, they were assured that Jesus promised our heavenly Father knows how to give good gifts to those who ask;

"Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him (Matt. 7: 9-11)?"

So, we are assured, when we seek the good gift of tongues, God will not allow us to get a stone or a snake, will He? That's His iron-clad promise, right?

Well, the Bible does give us examples where people asked God for things which He did not want them to have, but because they persisted and had their hearts set on their desires, God finally allowed them to receive what they craved, but it came with less than perfect consequences. An example or two --- or three --- will clear this up.

"GIVE US MEAT!" The children of Israel cried out to the LORD, **"Give us meat."** We are told they **did not wait for His counsel, but craved intensely in the wilderness so He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul (Ps. 106: 13-15)**. They asked for bread. They

got **manna** and it did sustain them for 40 years in the wilderness. But they got something else --- **leanness** of soul.

“GIVE US A KING!” Again, Israel craved to have a king. They wanted to be like the other nations who had kings. The prophet Samuel was grieved at their persistent request. And God knew if He gave them their request, it would bring the nation all kinds of troubles and some consequences not inconsequentially detrimental to their wellbeing. God’s answer to their persistent cries was a mixed bag, to put it nicely. They got their king and they got trouble.

‘GIVE ME VICTORY FOR MY PLANS!’ Remember the disobedient king Ahab? He wanted to go into battle, no matter what. He wanted victory for Israel. How easy to justify his intense desire by saying he was fighting God’s enemies. He even invited the good king Jehoshaphat to join him in a confederacy to help achieve God’s victory!

And there were lots of “prophets” to spur him on. But he didn’t really want to know what God thought about it all. In the words of the NT, Ahab **heaped teachers** up to please his **itching ears!**

His motives were cloaked in the guise of spirituality. King Jehoshaphat was also caught up in it all, and nearly perished in the process. Jehoshaphat was one of the most exemplary kings over God’s people, but he went against his inner conscience to go along with Ahab. Jehoshaphat asked, **“Is there not still a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of him?”** Something didn’t feel right. Good people, godly people can be *carried away*.

In the end, Ahab and Jehoshaphat went into battle knowing the clear warnings of God. Sometimes God does not stand in the way of people’s intense desires to the contrary.

Now, it won’t do, to dismiss this story as having no relevance to the many good Christian people who intensely desire God’s best for themselves when they earnestly seek the “gift of tongues”. These sincere folk cannot be compared to the disobedient and wicked Ahab, it’s true. However, the good king Jehoshaphat is there as a relevant warning. As already noted, good people, godly people can be *carried away*.

Why, do you think, all the warnings to God’s people for the need to test all teachings, to prove all doctrines are there, except the danger for deception and harmful delusion be real for His folks? Don’t think genuine and sincere Christians can’t be deceived, unless you think God’s repeated warnings about that dangerous possibility are just pretentious hot air!

Be sure that what you are asking for really is according to His word.

ONE COMMON DENOMINATOR

All charismatic-leaning folk have one common denominator; the need for genuine experience. There is the hunger to “feel the Spirit”. They say, “Don’t knock it until you’ve tried it”. “I know what I have experienced!” And who is there who does not want to know

more of God's reality and power? Isn't the Christian life a love-affair with the Lord? Love is experiential, surely?

It's been observed, "the man with an argument is always at the mercy of the man with an experience". I mentioned in a previous article about my communications with **Pat Boone** who was instrumental in promoting through his Hollywood status the charismatic movement in the 1960's & 70's. **Boone** famously said the charismatic movement **has no headquarters, no leader, and no doctrine**. We are just "feeding on Jesus". (⁵)

It seems that sometimes God accedes to persistent pleading and at times may allow His people to have something which is less than perfect for them. In my honest opinion, I think God allows sincere believers who are taught the evidence of the Spirit's fullness is that they will speak in "other tongues" and that, because of their persistent pleading, they will get the evidence they crave. They may not get **a snake** or **a stone**, but they may not get the absolute best God has for them. At best, they just get an emotional distraction.

SOME ARE DEMON-POSSESSED!

As I have repeatedly affirmed, the presence of many genuine charismatic Christians who sincerely love and trust the Lord should act as a brake to those who would all too quickly cry, "all tongues are satanic". (⁶) But I promised at the beginning I would share my own personal experience with "tongues". It's time for me to come clean now.

I have come across demonically inspired "tongues". There is often (but not always) some form of occultic past which has not been truly repented of, confessed and forsaken, and where the cleansing blood of Calvary has not been claimed. But not always.

THE GIFT OF DISCERNMENT

All Christians are meant to exercise discernment. The apostle John warns believers not to be gullible; **Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world (I John 4: 1)**. Every believer must continue to grow in their powers of discernment by the constant exercise of their spiritual disciplines (**Heb. 5: 12-14**).

However, we are told that some believers have received an ability to **distinguish between spirits** (*diákrisis* means to give official judgment based on discernment) for the benefit of the church. Paul lists amongst the various **activities** of the Spirit **the discernment of spirits (1 Cor. 12: 10)**.

Notice where the apostle places this mention. God gives to one the gift of **prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues**. The gift of discernment of spirits comes right *between* the gift of **prophecy** and **various kinds of**

⁵ George E. Gardiner, *The Corinthian Catastrophe*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, Third Printing, 1975, p51

⁶ See my article *Why Pentecost?* for a fuller treatment of the "father of the modern Pentecostal Movement", **Charles Parham**, and how some of the tongues spoken in the early days were indeed real and recognizable languages.

tongues; This order of placement is surely significant. To make the point more strongly, in the negative, this placement between prophecy and languages is not haphazard!

It would seem that any exercise of Prophecy or Tongues was to be under the watchfulness of those who were endowed with the special discernment necessary for the safe environment within the Body of Christ.

THE MIND IS THE GATEKEEPER OF THE SOUL

The apostle Paul elevates the place our minds must play in our worship and prayer-lives. Anybody who stands to speak in a “language” in the church must do so **with interpretation**. All spoken words must be **intelligible, otherwise how will anyone know what is being said? Otherwise you will be speaking into the air (14: 9).**

Paul explains his own experiential method; **I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also (14: 15).** Your spirit must never operate outside the mind! What God has joined together, we separate to our own peril. There is to be no such thing as praying mysteries in the spirit over which the pray-er has no understanding!

BUT WHAT ABOUT ROMANS 8: 26 ?

Some have tried to find praying in tongues in this verse;

Likewise, the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself (⁷) makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The **groanings** are **not** utterable! Or, as the **NRSV** says, our **sighs are too deep for words**. There are no words for this kind of deep praying. Just sighs. Even the tongues-speaker admits he is *speaking something!*

An example of this kind of praying might be Hannah who was in such bitter pain in her soul that all she could manage were inner, silent groans (**1 Sam.19f**). She could not find outer expression for her groanings, but even so, she still knew exactly in her mind what she had requested of the LORD. She prayed with the spirit and with the mind.

MEDITATION

When the Bible talks about meditation it says, **“in His law he meditates day and night” (Ps. 1: 2)**. Bible meditation is *actively thinking* over God’s word. Bible meditation requires concentration, attention, and logical process. It is not the kind of Yogic or other transcendental meditation that encourages mindless repetition and “focusing on the dot in the front of your forehead”!

⁷ **Αὐτὸ, auto**; I have translated this third person pronoun according to the Greek neuter, “it”. The KJV renders this pronoun faithfully. There is strong evidence that the capitalised “**Spirit**” should be translated with a small “s” --- **spirit** --- meaning our own spirit in prayer. This harmonises for example, with our passage in **I Cor. 14: 15** where it is our spirits that pray.

The method of mysticism where your mind is bypassed is not Bible meditation! The Devil's type of meditation is where your mind stands in the way of your experience of the "other". The Devil says your mind hinders and blocks your experience. Which is to say, your God-given mind is the Devil's enemy! But, we are told to wear **the helmet of salvation**. Protect your mind at all costs, dear Christian believer!

Those Christians who listen to any so-called Christian teacher telling them it's necessary to let their minds go blank and just start babbling before they can be filled with the Spirit, are listening to **deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4: 1)**. Never, ever surrender your God-given mind --- His safeguard to your inner soul and spirit --- to another being, whether man or spirit! This is the **express** word of the Spirit of God (**1 Tim. 4: 1**).

MY EXPERIENCE

I will relate what happens to Christians who disobey this clear word of God. With blank minds, they may unwittingly have invited wicked spiritual powers to begin to dominate their thinking. I have been personally involved in the "testing" of many "tongues". Countless are the folk in my own experience who have, to their absolute horror and disgust, discovered the spirit praying through their spirit has been foul.

Here's how it works. The person praying in their "tongue" right at the very beginning began their experience with earnest prayer --- and usually with encouragement to by-pass their conscious controls. They were told they would not know what they would be saying. Their minds would be unfruitful. They would pray "mysteries" in their spirit. Once initiated, they believed they could finally and sincerely worship the Lord God.

However, initially, not a few harbour internal doubts about what's going on. In many cases, such doubts may continue for years. In desperation, they would then come and ask for their tongue to be tested. Sometimes they will have found the most horrible suggestions pop into their minds, even when they have been praying in their "heavenly tongue". (⁸)

The Christian counselor will have spent time in preparation by prayer and often by fasting, and making sure there is no unconfessed sin in their own life. Spiritual warfare is costly.

As the person begins to pray in their tongue in the presence of the counselor, the spirit giving the utterance is challenged in the mighty name of Jesus Christ the Son of God to confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord". (Remember that every spirit that confesses "Jesus is Lord" comes from the true God as per **First Cor. 12: 3**).

The counselor speaks: "The spirit giving this tongue, you are commanded in the name of Jesus the Son of God. Do you confess that Jesus is Lord?" Where a demon is present there will often be a violent resistance at this moment of challenge.

⁸ It is possible for Christians to be demonised to varying degrees, though I do not believe Christians can be demon possessed. Which is to say, whenever the Devil can get a foothold into a believer's thinking, that person will experience unhappiness, depression, impure thoughts, etc. to varying degrees.

If there are foul spirits that have been lurking behind the scenes in darkness, they will refuse to confess that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord and Son of God most high. In fact, when commanded to speak the truth before the LORD God Almighty, these demonic powers will often retort in a chilling tone, “No! No! We will not confess Jesus is Lord!”

Oftentimes, when such a spirit manifests itself, it will let out the most blood-curdling of cries, and even screams, “No! Jesus is accursed!”

During this process, the person praying in the tongue is like a passive third party, looking on from the sidelines as it were. The conversation is between the Christian counselor and the spirit behind the tongue. But, at any time, the pray-er’s mind can kick in when needed.

As they continue to “let the spirit flow”, to their shock and horror, the wicked spirit will now manifest its true colours. The pray-er now realises that what they thought all along was a language of praise to their dear Lord Jesus, has really been a gateway to the most horrible curses and blasphemy from the spirit-world.

Once the demon has been dealt with, the person is shattered, often feeling drained, but they must be led in a prayer of confession. They must tell the Lord they renounce this demonic tongue and that from now on they will pray with their minds in full operation as they worship God with all their beings.

Now, forgive me, if I have revealed a little too much. But, I know too much to remain silent. I myself am not a man without experience in the spirit-realm. You may tell me you know what you have experienced when praying in tongues. That my friend, I do not deny.

However, I know what I have seen. I know what I have heard and experienced. To be sure, as I have said, I have seen many tongues of the psychological nature. They are a useless distraction. But, I have seen many “tongues” manifest as demonic. I have seen a man’s face contort to the point where his visage is completely changed to that of another. In severe cases, the face has become the face of the indwelling demon.

I have heard a man’s voice turn into that of a woman’s or of a young child’s. I have heard a woman’s gentle voice turned into the deepest of steely demonic tones. I have had demons threaten me. It’s chilling! All this, from people who normally are quiet, gentle, respectful, and who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It’s not their own redeemed spirit manifesting.

I am sorry to have to write these things. But I know what I have experienced. And I say to any dear Christian who loves the Lord Jesus and so badly wants to honour his most holy name --- never, ever, ever, surrender the control of your mind. Your mind is God’s gatekeeper to your spirit. Jesus says God’s people worship Him **in spirit and in truth**.

In the context of Paul’s correction of the Corinthian charismatic confusion we are **commanded to be adults in your thinking (14: 20)**. We are clearly told to **pray with the spirit and with the mind**. We are directed to **sing praise with the spirit and to sing praise with the mind also (14: 15-16)**.

To flout these instructions is to invite deception. To disobey God's word may mean we get a stone for bread, or worse, a snake for an egg. God is under no obligation to protect us from deception if we fail to walk in His light.

I testify to having seen in my own experience the trouble, the trauma, the tragedy where failure to obey these Scriptural instructions has been encouraged.

And should anyone say to me, as have some, "Well, I have the gift of tongues, I know what I know." My reply is, "Well, God has given to the church others who have the gift of discernment. And I too, know what I know."