

Things the Tongues Movement Will Never Face

By Richard Jordan

The Charismatic Movement has so influenced the church of our day that speaking in tongues has become an accepted phenomenon. Touted as a proof and demonstration of the Spirit-filled life,” tongues have become a standard part of the modern Christian culture and are commonly used as a measure of the validity of Christian experience.

The proponents of speaking in tongues seek to use Scripture to prove the authenticity of their practice. Yet when we examine the Scriptures to see if this practice is consistent with the Bible’s own instructions we discover that there are at least six Scriptural facts the tongues movement never face. Tongue-talkers fail to submit themselves to the final authority of the Word of God in this matter and rather use the Scripture simply to “proof text” the validity of an experience they choose to have.

The Apostle Paul sets forth the procedure for the practice of tongues in I Corinthians 14. He founded the Corinthian assembly and then nourished it in the Word and dealt with many difficulties caused by their shortcomings and failures. One of the problems at Corinth was the abuse of the spiritual gifts in evidence in their midst. Paul wrote I Corinthians 12-14 to deal with that abuse.

In I Corinthians 14 he gives six very clear rules for the practice of tongues. If we want to ascertain if it is God speaking through a tongue-talker, here is an objective set of rules which clearly identify when it is the Holy Spirit who is working. These six tests present problems the modern tongues movement will never face because they would put it out of business.

Paul introduces these instructions by saying:

“Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (I Corinthians 14:20).

Those who do not understand what Paul is going to set forth in the following verses demonstrate themselves to be children in understanding. This does not mean they are devils, just that they are babies when it comes to understanding how God works today.

Friend, isn’t it time we grow up spiritually and “put away childish things?” The objective standard by which to evaluate the tongues movement is set forth in the following rules:

RULE 1

Tongues are for the benefit of the nation Israel:

“In the law it is written, With *men of* other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:21).

Who is “this people” to whom God will speak with “other tongues?” Check Isaiah 28:11 and see. “This people” is clearly the nation Israel. Thus the next verse declares: “Wherefore tongues are for a sign”—and who is the sign program for? I Corinthians 1:22 leaves no doubt.

“For the Jews require a sign ...”

Tongues are for the benefit of the nation Israel. They were representative of the *sign gifts* given to that favored nation. In Mark 16:17,18 Jesus Christ decreed:

“And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

“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.

“These signs” are a collective unit, *a package of gifts* associated with “confirming the Word” in relation to Israel’s program (Mark 16:20; Hebrews2:4). This “signs and wonders” program has its roots in Exodus 4 where God called Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt.

When Moses protested his commission, God gave him two signs—serpent handling and healing—and then assured him:

“And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign” (Exodus 4:8).

Christ’s reference to taking up serpents and healing the sick carried His hearers all the way back to the very birth of their nation. Signs and wonders were the birthright of the nation. The bard of Israel even identifies them as “our signs” (Psalm74:9).

The specific reason for the provision of the gift of tongues has to do with equipping Israel to fulfill her purpose as God’s kingdom nation. Zechariah 8:23 looks forward to the kingdom reign of Christ and demonstrates Israel’s role:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days *it shall come to pass*, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard *that God is with you.*”

In that day “all nations shall flow unto [(Jerusalem)]... for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2,3). In order to minister to those “out of all languages of the nations” God will overrule the effects of the confusion of languages set in motion in Genesis 11 by giving the gift of tongues to Israel so she can fulfill her commission. Thus tongues specifically belong to that favored nation.

RULE 2

Tongues are for convincing unbelieving Jews— not for convincing believers, and especially not Gentile believers.

“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” (I Corinthians 14:22).

Tongues were a testimony to *unbelieving* Jews. Because of their heritage “the Jews *required* a sign” (I Corinthians 1:22). They simply would not believe without it. This explains Christ’s words to the Jewish nobleman in John 4:48.

“... Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

Even when in operation among the Gentiles, as at Corinth, the sign gifts were for the specific benefit of unbelieving Israel. With the raising up of the Apostle Paul, God introduced a significant change in His dealings. No longer was Israel to hold center stage as God’s chosen vessel, but now Paul declares:

“... through their [Israel’s] fall salvation *is come* unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (Romans 11:11).

As this temporary suspension of their program was introduced, a special period of testimony was extended to the nation Israel in order to testify of the change taking place. The presence of the sign gifts, which were Israel’s special possession, among the Gentiles was a testimony to unbelieving Jews that their God had departed from them and was “visiting the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.”

Thus even the practice of tongues among the Gentiles in the early stage of the dispensation of grace was specifically for the benefit of unbelieving Israel.

RULE 3

No more than three people are to speak in tongues at any one meeting:

“If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three ...” (I Corinthians 14:27).

This rule needs little comment. The instruction is clear. No more than three people in any meeting are to speak in tongues. If you are in a meeting and more than three people speak in tongues, you know something: *God is not doing it.*

RULE 4

Each person of the three is to wait his turn:

“...and *that* by course ...” (14:27).

When the “Spirit of God is exercising the tongue every (one of the three) will not be speaking at the same time.

Someone may say, “But I have a tongue and I have to exercise it.” “No, you don’t! The verse says that if the gift is from God it is subject to your control. It is not some mindless activity that just happens. It is coordinated by the Holy Spirit who set down these rules to identify how He operates in this realm. Thus all things will be done “in order” (verse 40) “for God is not the author of confusion” (verse 33).

RULE 5

One person is to interpret:

“... 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” (14:27,28).

When there is no interpreter, no one is to speak in tongues. Evidently there was to be someone there with the gift of interpretation identified ahead of time—else you would not know if you should speak. If the Holy Spirit gave the tongue, he would provide the interpreter.

RULE 6

Only men were to speak in tongues:

“If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue...”

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law” (14:27,34).

Paul is not prohibiting women from talking or holding a conversation during the meetings. No. The context of I Corinthians 14:34 is *speaking in tongues*. “It is not permitted unto them to speak”—in tongues. This rule alone would put the modern tongues movement out of business.

If a person is speaking “by the Spirit” we can expect no less than that they will follow the guidelines set down by that same Spirit. Two men, three at the most, get up by course to speak followed by an interpreter who interprets what has been said. No women speakers. No talking at the same time. No speaking by more than three. No absence of an interpreter. And all done as a witness to unbelieving Jews!

No one who speaks in tongues today follows these clear rules. In fact, few (if any) tongue-talkers are even aware of these basic elements of the operation of the gift of tongues. This clearly demonstrates that the modern tongues movement is not of divine origin. It is simply not Scriptural.

The truth of the matter is that God is not operating the sign gift program to day. The question arises, then, as to why He has ceased to do so. Tongues were once in order—*why have they ceased?*

I Corinthians 13:8 explains that the sign gift program was going to pass away.

“Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away.”

There was coming a time when the sign giftsⁱ would no longer be in operation. They would no longer be a part of God’s program—they would no longer be dispensationally correct.

When this was to happen is detailed in the next verses:

“For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.
“But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (I Corinthians 13:9,10).

The sign gifts would cease “when that which is perfect is come.” Some suggest this is a reference to the return of Christ, but this can hardly be the case. Do we refer to our Lord’s return as “that which”? No. He is a person, not a thing. Beyond this is the fact that the word “perfect” has to do with maturity—being brought to full completion. Nowhere in Scripture are we given to think we should wait until Christ’s return to “grow up.” That is something we are to do *now*. (Ephesians 4:15.)

The identity of “that which is perfect” is not difficult to ascertain from the verses themselves: “We know in part.” What then, is “in part?” *Knowledge*. What does away with partial knowledge? *Complete knowledge!* The perfecter and completer *must* be of the same substance as the thing being completed.

“That which is perfect” has to do with the *completion of the message* committed to the Apostle Paul. It is a reference to the fullness of the knowledge of the mystery revelation given through him. Ephesians 4 sheds further light on this process by telling us:

“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:8,13).

Gifts were given—and needed—“until” the revelation was completed. In this regard, Colossians 1:25,26 tells us:

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

“*Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.”

The mystery revealed to Paul completed the Word of God. It ended the need for further revelation. The written Word of God is now complete.

It is at this point that the claims of the tongues movement are most disturbing. When a person claims to speak in tongues they are claiming that God is speaking through them (cf. Acts 2:4). This is a blanket denial of the complete and final authority of the written Word of God.

We simply cannot believe that God’s Word is complete while claiming that He continues to give a further word through *extra-Biblical* revelations. This was exactly what was done with tongues. While they were in order they were used to communicate revelation from God. Today that revelation is complete. God has finished His Word.

The tongues movement is not simply unscriptural, it is dangerously wrong. Speaking in tongues is the most dangerous error of the Charismatic Movement not because of its excesses or emotional focus but because it is in its most basic form the cultic doctrine of continuing inspiration—a doctrine that strikes at the very heart of the written Word of God.

We do have the complete and preserved Word of God and we have it available to us as English-speaking people in a reliable, authoritative form that we can confidently trust—the King James Bible. It is through the Word of truth written in a book studied “rightly divided” that God speaks today—and through which we grow up in Christ and become workmen of God (Ephesians 4:15; II Timothy 2:15).

ⁱ The references in I Corinthians 13:8 are, of course, to the *gifts* of prophecy, tongues and knowledge (see 12:7-11). There will never be a time when people do not know or communicate with language or when prophecy does not prove true. The references are to the passing away of the *gifts* program.