

# **What About Tongues?** by Dr. Jay Zinn

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1900), a Methodist evangelist by the name of Charles F. Parham had a Bible School in Topeka, Kansas. He gave his forty students an assignment to diligently study what the book of Acts showed to be the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and report back in three days. Each student's findings were the same: every recipient baptized in the Holy Spirit spoke in "other" tongues. The result of this study sent them to their knees in prayer for God to bless them with this gift. As it was for the 120 disciples on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon these students and they began to speak in tongues. This event sparked a renewal and revival which spread across the Midwest and Southern California to a humble Los Angeles mission on Azusa Street led by a black pastor named William J. Seymour. By 1906, people came from all over the world to Azusa to see and hear more about this experience. Many who heard the message, believed and received the baptism with the evidence of speaking in tongues, and took their experience back to their own countries. As in the case for all restored truth, this doctrine was not embraced by all and is still resisted to this day. It is my hope that this brochure can shed some light on the misunderstandings and mysteries that surrounds this subject—speaking in tongues.

## ***To start this study we begin with this important point:***

The doctrine of speaking in tongues is a "non-essential" teaching. This means it is a matter of individual conviction but has no bearing on determining one's salvation. It is not a heaven-or-hell problem. What matters most is to respect the individual convictions of either side of this teaching and agree to disagree in a loving and humble attitude toward each other. It should never be an "us-versus-them" in matters of "non-essential" doctrines. Whatever our personal convictions are on this subject, let us follow the admonition of Paul in his letter to the Romans:

*"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves...Live in harmony with one another (NIV)." Rom. 12:10, 16*

## ***Why is there such controversy surrounding this experience?***

- **Controversy** surrounds this because of the erroneous teaching of some claiming that one is not saved until they speak in tongues. The Bible does not teach this.
- **Controversy** surrounds this because restored foundational truths of the early church—lost during the "dark ages"—have always been met with resistance. This is how denominations came about. God would restore a truth to a seeking people embracing that truth, controversy then results in church leaders forcing a separation of fellowship. The "new" doctrine then becomes the cornerstone of a newly formed denomination of like-minded believers on that teaching.

In time the new formed denomination settles in, becomes entrenched in what was once fresh and new, and goes from being "rejected," to unwittingly becoming a "rejecter" of the next truth God restores to the church. Church history affirms this. The same has held true for the doctrine of speaking in tongues. Thus, the rise of Pentecostal denominations after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

- **Controversy** surrounds this experience because of fear. Fear of the lack of faith. Though one may see it in scripture, it's hard to cross that line of faith required to believe this could actually happen today. Fear of rejection. What if God doesn't give it to me when I ask for it? What does that mean? Am I not worthy of it? If I do get it, how will that affect my current relationships with those who think this isn't of God? Fear of deception—either in missing out on real truth or embracing false teaching. These are only a few types of fear that shakes up one's comfort zone, and feeds the sense of controversy.
- **Controversy** surrounds this experience because of pride. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Pride only breeds quarrel..." Pride on both sides of the fence. Pride from those who have much at stake to change their views, and pride by those who assume a superior posture over those who have not experienced this.

- **Controversy** surrounds this because of the misunderstanding of scripture references used for or against this experience. The rest of this brochure will be dedicated to addressing these misunderstandings of scripture.

**1. The first misunderstanding—the belief that the “gift” of salvation and the “gift” of the Holy Ghost are the same gift and experience.**

The Bible demonstrates there are two separate and distinct “gifts” from God in the life of the believer—the *gift* of eternal life and the *gift* of the Holy Ghost. Note the contrasts of the two experiences below:

**The “Gift” of Eternal Life:**

- Greek for “gift” is: *charisma*
- *Charisma*: Romans 5:15, 16; 6:23
- Born of the Spirit
- Born Again of the Spirit
- Receive the Holy Spirit *within*
- Twelve Disciples (John 20:22)
- Samaritans (Acts 8:12)
- House of Cornelius (Acts 10:43)
- Ephesian disciples (Acts 19:1-2)

**The “Gift” of the Holy Spirit:**

- Greek for “gift” is: *dorea*
- *Dorea*: Acts 2:38; 8:29; 10:45; 11:17
- Baptized (Filled) with the Spirit
- Anointed with the Spirit
- Receive the Holy Spirit *upon*
- Disciples 47 days later (Acts 2:1-4)
- Samaritans days later (Acts 8:14-17)
- House of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-46)
- Ephesian disciples later (Acts 19:1-6)

Until one recognizes that the scriptural pattern reveals two experiences, the confusion will remain. The misunderstanding is in the belief that one receives all that the Holy Spirit has for us when we’re born again and that there is no “other” experience. This belief is difficult to sustain in light of the above scriptures.

**2. The second misunderstanding—the belief that the evidence of tongues for Spirit Baptism does not apply to everyone and could be one of many of the spiritual “gifts” in 1 Corinthians 12.**

This belief exists because of a mistaken interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:29-30 which reads: “*Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? **Do all speak in tongues?** Do all interpret?*” (NIV). The obvious answer is “no.” But is *this speaking in tongues* referring to the speaking in tongues recurring in Acts? The answer is, no. So let’s take a look at the difference. In the book of Acts, the consistent pattern of the **evidence** accompanying the Baptism (Gift) of the Holy Spirit was clearly *speaking in tongues*:

**Acts 2:4** - All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and **began to speak in other tongues.**

**Acts 10:44-46** - While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. **For they heard them speaking in tongues** and praising God.

**Acts 19:1-2, 6** - ...Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some **disciples** and asked them, "Did you receive the [gift of] Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit...When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they **spoke in tongues** and prophesied.

**Note:** This evidence is confirmed by Jesus when he said: “*These **signs** will accompany those who believe: ...they will **speak in new tongues.***”

An important point is to be made here. **Tongues** is NOT the gift being referred to when receiving the “gift” of the Holy Spirit—the **anointing power** “itself” is the gift, and tongues is simply the evidence of that. “You will receive **power** when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” When prophets, priests, and kings were anointed in the Old Testament, oil was poured on them. When Jesus was anointed in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit—in the form of a dove—landed on Him. And when the believers were anointed in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in new tongues. All **anointings** were accompanied with something tangible as an evidence or a “sign” of their anointing. So the “sign” of the gift (tongues) isn’t the gift, it is the tangible evidence that you’ve just been

anointed and clothed with **power** from on high (Luke 24:49). The “power” of the Holy Spirit is now available to us in the nine gifts of the Spirit. This is why it shows some recipients prophesying **after** they spoke in tongues, not before (Acts 19:6).

**IN THE OLD TESTAMENT** the power to do what kings were anointed to do came **after** the oil (the tangible evidence) was poured on them:

**1 Sam 10:1, 6** - Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?...The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you [Saul] in **power**, and you will prophesy with them.

**1 Sam 16:13** - So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him [David] in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in **power**.

**IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**, Jesus was anointed to operate in power **after** the dove (the tangible evidence) landed on Him.

**Luke 3:21-22; 4:1, 14, 18** - And as he [Jesus] was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove...Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan ...Jesus returned to Galilee in the **power** of the Spirit... “The Spirit of the Lord is on me [Jesus], because he has anointed me...”

**John 2:11** - This [water to wine], the first of his miraculous signs [after his anointing], Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

**Acts 10:38** - ...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and **power**, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil...

**IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**, the believers were anointed to operate in power in the gifts of the Spirit **after** the Holy Spirit came on them with speaking in tongues (the tangible evidence).

**Acts 1:8** – “You will receive power **when** the Holy Spirit comes on you...”

**Acts 19:6** - *When Paul placed his hands on them [Ephesian disciples], the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and **prophesied** [the gift of prophecy].*

### **Thus the Pattern:**

Anointing + Tangible Sign = **power** to operate in the gifts of the Spirit.

A diligent study of the book of Acts will reveal that any and all believers who operated in a spiritual gift of 1 Corinthians 12, did so **after** they were anointed with the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. This is where the confusion lies and needs to be clarified. The “gift of tongues” in 1 Corinthians 12 is not referring to the tongues found as a “sign” in the book of Acts. There is a difference. Please note below:

The “tongues” received as a **sign** of the Baptism (Gift) of the Holy Spirit is a private language used to “edify” the **believer** at any time he/she chooses:

**1 Cor 14:2-4** - For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit...He who speaks in a tongue **edifies** himself...

**1 Cor 14:14-16** - For if I pray in a tongue my spirit prays [mysteries to God], but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit [mysteries to God], but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit [mysteries to God], but I will also sing with my mind.

**1 Cor 14:18** - I [Paul] thank God that I **speaking in tongues** more than all of you.

**Rom 8:26** - In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with **groans** that words cannot express.

**Jude 20** - But you, dear friends, **build** [edify] **yourselves up** in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

The “tongues” spoken in a church service setting is one of the nine spiritual gifts used to “edify” the **church** as the Holy Spirit determines:

**1 Cor 12:1-2** - Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

**1 Cor 12:7-11** - Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the common good**. To one there is given through the Spirit [i.e. a spiritual gift] the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another **speaking in different kinds of tongues**, and to still another **the interpretation of tongues**. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he [the Holy Spirit] determines.

**1 Cor 12:30** - Do all have gifts of healing? Do all **speaking in tongues**? Do all **interpret**?

**1 Cor 14:5** - I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who **speaks in tongues**, unless he interprets, so that the church may be **edified**.

**1 Cor 14:12** - Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that **build up** [edify] the church.

**1 Cor 14:26-28** - What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, **a tongue** or **an interpretation**. All of these must be done **for the strengthening** of the church. If anyone **speaks in a tongue**, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and **someone must interpret**. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak [in tongues] to himself and God.

**1 Cor 14:39-40** -Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy [a spiritual gift], and do not forbid **speaking in tongues** [a spiritual gift, to be followed by an interpretation].

So when a person is baptized (anointed) with the gift (power) of the Holy Spirit, they do not receive the spiritual gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 12, they receive a personal language of tongues as a sign. Note the distinction—tongues as:

**A SIGN - Mark 16:17; Acts 2:4; 19:6**

- **All** may speak at one time
- **All** may speak in this setting
- **No** interpretation is required

**A GIFT – 1 Corinthians 12 and 14**

- Only **one** may speak at a time
- Two, **at the most**, three may speak
- Each tongue **must be** interpreted

Thus 1 Corinthians 12:30 is **not** referring to the “tongues” spoken when baptized in the Holy Spirit. It is referring to the spiritual gift of tongues brought forth in the church setting to be followed by the gift of interpretation. So it is out of context to use this text to teach not everyone will speak in tongues when they’re baptized in the Holy Spirit. What is more legitimate to teach is that not everyone who speaks in tongues (their prayer language) will be led by the Holy Spirit in a church to bring a “tongue,” followed by an interpretation. Is every spirit-filled believer who speaks in English going to bring forth a prophecy? No. Is every spirit-filled believer who speaks in a “prayer language” going to bring forth a tongue in the service? No. Two—or at the most—three. This is what 1 Corinthians 12:30 is speaking about.

3. **The third misunderstanding—the belief that speaking in tongues has ceased and is no longer for today.**

Let's look at the text and context from which this teaching evolved:

**1 Cor 13:8-11** - *Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; **where there are tongues, they will be stilled**; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.*

The context of this chapter is centered on “love” which is **eternal** versus “gifts” which are **temporal**. We are to follow the way of love **AND** eagerly desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1). We need the gifts motivated by love, today, yet when Jesus the Perfect One returns, the need for the gifts will become obsolete. Love will prevail, yes, but the gift of prophecy, the gift of tongues, and the gift of the word of knowledge will all cease to exist. They're needed only for this temporal, imperfect life, until the perfect eternal life has come.

So to use this as a premise to disavow tongues for today is inconsistent with the context. If this context means tongues has already ceased, the question is, when did it cease? There is no historical account of this ceasing in the book of Acts. Not when Peter said that this gift Jesus promised (Acts 1:4-5) was for *everyone the Lord calls* (Acts 2:39). To say tongues have ceased before those yet to be called is to contradict the apostle Peter. Have you been called?

*All scriptures quoted are taken from the New International Version. Any [brackets] added to a verse were added by the author for clarification.*