

Pneumatology: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit


“Speaking in Tongues”

(Adapted in part from Wayne Grudem,
Systematic Theology)

Two (2) Key Passages:

1. Acts 2
2. I Corinthians 12-14

What is Speaking in Tongues?

 *“Speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.”*

Seven (7) Characteristics of “Speaking in Tongues”

(1) Words of prayer or Praise generally spoken directly to God

- 1 Cor. 14:2 “one who speaks in in a tongue speaks not to men but to God.”
- 1 Cor. 14:28 (if no interpreter) one should “keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God.”
- Acts 2:11 “we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

(2) Not Understood by the Speaker

- 1 Cor. 14:2 “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.”
- 1 Cor. 14:13-19. (The entire paragraph of this passage assumes that speech in tongues in the congregation, when it is not accompanied by interpretation, is not understood by those who hear)

(2) Not Understood by the Speaker (Continued)

- At Pentecost speech in tongues was in known languages that were understood by those who heard:
- Acts 2:6 “each one heard them speaking in his own language.”
- But once again the speech was not understood by the speakers, for what caused the amazement was that Galileans were speaking all these different languages (Acts 2:7).

(2) Not Understood by the Speaker (Continued)

- It seems, therefore, that at times speaking in tongues may involve speech in actual human languages, sometimes even languages that are understood by some of those who hear . . .
- But at other times—and Paul assumes that this will ordinarily be the case—the speech will be in a language that “no one understands” (1 Cor. 14:2).

(2) Not Understood by the Speaker (Continued)

- Sometimes the gift may result in speaking in a human language that the speaker has not learned, but ordinarily it seems that it will involve speech in a language that no one understands, whether that be a human language or not.

(2) Not Understood by the Speaker (Continued)

- Acts 2 refers to speech in known human languages that had not been learned by the speakers.
- In 1 Cor. 14, however, the speech may have been in unknown human languages, or in angelic languages (1 Cor. 13:1) or in some specialized kind of language given by the Holy Spirit to various speakers individually.

Comic Relief . . .



Wait! There's more . . .

THE OTHER SIDE
**Do you need
a reason?**



(3) Prayer with the Spirit, not with the Mind

■ 1 Cor. 14:13-16: “Let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind (NKJV, “understanding”) is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies that place of the uninformed say ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?”

(4) Not Ecstatic but Self-Controlled

- Some of the extreme elements in the Pentecostal movement have allowed frenzied and disorderly conduct at worship services, and this has, in the minds of some, perpetuated the notion that speaking in tongues is a kind of ecstatic speech over which the person has no control . . .

(4) Not Ecstatic but Self-Controlled (Continued)

- But this is not the picture given in the New Testament.
- Even when the Holy Spirit came with overwhelming power at Pentecost, the disciples were able to stop speaking in tongues so that Peter could give his sermon . . .

(4) Not Ecstatic but Self-Controlled (Continued)

- More explicitly, Paul says “if any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret, let each of them keep silence in church and speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

(5) Tongues Without Interpretation

- If no one known to have the gift of interpretation is present in the assembly, then speaking in tongues should be in private (1 Cor. 14:27-28). No speech in tongues without interpretation should be given in the church service.

(5) Tongues Without Interpretation (Continued)

- If believers speak in tongues without interpretation in church, they will be acting and thinking like “children” (1 Cor. 14:20).
- Without interpretation, an unbeliever may enter the congregation, hear people speaking in tongues and conclude that the Christians are “out of their minds” (1 Cor. 14:23).

(5) Tongues Without Interpretation (Continued)

- However much Paul warns against using tongues without interpretation in church, he certainly views it positively and encourages it in private.
- 1 Cor. 14:15 “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also.”
- 1 Cor. 14:18 “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all.”
- 1 Cor. 14:5 “Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.”
- 1 Cor. 14:39 “Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.”

(6) Tongues with Interpretation: Edification for the Church

- Gift of Interpretation: *“Reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues.”*
- 1 Cor. 14:5 “He who prophesies is greater than he who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.”
- Once a message in tongues is interpreted, all can understand. In that case, Paul says that the message in tongues is as valuable to the church as prophecy.

(7) Not All Speak in Tongues

- Just as not all Christians are apostles, and not all are prophets or teachers, and not all possess gifts of healing, so not all speak with tongues (1 Cor. 12:30).
- The gift of tongues—just like every other gift—is not given by the Holy Spirit to every Christian who seeks it. He “apportions to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor. 12:11).

