

Three Questions About Speaking in Tongues

Many people say they are able to speak in tongues today as some in New Testament times did. They claim this power is given by the Holy Spirit. By looking at three questions about tongue speaking we can know whether or not this miraculous gift is still available today.

Question #1. What Was Tongue Speaking as We Read of It in the New Testament?

This is an important question. As we answer it from the Bible we will see that tongue speaking in New Testament times was something totally different from the so-called tongue speaking today. Look at the second chapter of Acts to see the difference. First of all notice verses 1-4: *“And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”*

These verses refer to the apostles who had been promised the power of the Holy Spirit by Jesus (Acts 1:8). They had

been waiting for that power which enabled them to speak in other tongues. Now, what is meant by “tongues?” The answer is seen by looking at other verses.

In verse 6 of Acts 2, we read, *“And when this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speaking in his own language.”* Notice the words *“in his own language.”* What was called “tongues” in verse 4 is referred to as “language” in verse 6. But it was a language known to some of those who were in the audience. Then in verses 7 and 8 we read *“And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, Behold, are not all these that speak Galilaeans? And how hear we, every man in our own language wherein we were born?”* Notice the expression *“In our own tongue.”* Can we not see that the words “tongue” and “language” mean the same thing? These people heard the apostles preaching to them in their native tongues or languages. The miracle was upon the apostles. The Holy Spirit gave them the power to speak languages they had never studied!

Today, those who claim to be “Pentecostal” in their practice of tongue speaking are not doing what was done on Pentecost at all. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit gave the apostles the power to communicate the Gospel to people in the native languages of those people. Such is not being done today.

Question #2. Who Was Able to Speak in Tongues During New Testament Times?

There were three groups in the New Testament who could speak in tongues, or languages they had never studied. The first group was the apostles, as we have already noted. They received the baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost which gave them this power. The second group included those people to whom the apostles gave this power by laying their hands on them. This is the way this miraculous gift was given. One example of this is seen in Acts 19. There certain disciples were given this power by the laying on of the Apostle Paul’s hands. Notice verses 5 and 6 *“And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.”* Is there an apostle still living today? No. So there is no one who can give this power to anyone else. And no one is still alive today who was given this power by an apostle. Therefore, the gift of tongue speaking is not available today.

“But what about Cornelius and his household?” someone asks. They spoke in tongues without an apostle laying his hands on them. This is true, but this third group which spoke in tongues in the New Testament was a special group. Cornelius spoke in tongues as a sign that the Gentiles were to receive the Gospel along with the Jews. You see, until the events recorded in Acts 10 and 11 occurred, only the Jews had received the Gospel. But here God was making it clear that the Gentiles were also to hear the Gospel. To

make this clear to the Christians (former Jews) who were present at the house of Cornelius, God gave the Holy Spirit directly to these Gentiles. By doing so, no one who saw it could deny that this was the work of God. It was a special event for a special purpose. It happened only one time. The Gospel is still being preached to the Gentiles, but no person is receiving the Holy Spirit as Cornelius did. Therefore, no person is speaking in tongues as he did.

So we see the three groups in the New Testament who spoke in tongues. Each did so for a specific and special purpose. Those purposes do not exist today, and no one is speaking in tongues today.

Question #3. Was the Gift of Tongue Speaking to Cease, And If So, When?

The answer is yes. This gift of the Holy Spirit was to end when the New Testament was completed. This was clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. The verses tell us: *“Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I*

was fully known. But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” Paul refers to *“that which is perfect.”* The word “perfect” means **complete** or **whole**. At the time Paul wrote, the revelation from God was not in its final written form. Now it is complete. *“That which is perfect”* (the New Testament) has come and that which was *“in part”* (miraculous gifts) has been done away. So we can see that Paul’s inspired prediction has come true.

Tongue speaking in the New Testament referred to speaking in foreign languages not known to the speaker. There were three groups in the New Testament able to speak in tongues miraculously. None of these groups is present today. The miraculous gift of tongue speaking was limited in time to the period before the New Testament was completed. That time has come and gone, and so has the ability to speak in tongues, along with all other miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. We have the Word of God. Let us follow it in all things and teach only the truth.



Truth For The World

truthfortheworld.org

info@tftw.org

P.O. Box 241
Bethel Springs, TN 38315
U.S.A.



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