

Faith Pulpit

Some Reflections on the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements, Part 2

Some Observations and Comments

1. The teaching common to all of these groups, which states that all of the gifts given by the Holy Spirit in New Testament times ought to be observed and practiced by Christians today, is definitely unbiblical. The supernatural sign gifts were intended by God for the Apostolic Age and were designed to be temporary. It is not the purpose of this paper to deal exhaustively with the Bible passages which support this view, but if it is true, we should not be taken in by contemporary experiential phenomena—no matter where they are found. The Bible must be our standard.

2. What does the Bible really say about tongues-speaking?

First, there are not very many passages which actually mention it. Mark 16:17–18 lists some historical phenomena experienced by the early Christians, which demonstrated the validity of their message. Acts 2 narrates the occurrence at Pentecost, Acts 10 describes the conversion of the first Gentiles, and Acts 19 describes the conversion of the disciples of John the Baptist. 1 Corinthians 12–14 presents Paul's corrective message to a carnal church abusing spiritual gifts.

Second, other than the Corinthian passage, tongues-speaking does not appear to have been a regular, ongoing occurrence.

Third, tongues-speaking in the Bible seems to have involved actual languages. Acts 2 describes the phenomenon in the following language: "Every man heard them speak in his own language" (verse 6), and "How hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews

and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (verses 8–11). When the Gentiles in Acts 10 experience this phenomenon, Peter likens it to precisely what had occurred at Pentecost (10:44–48). In 1 Corinthians, Paul seeks to establish guidelines for the proper use of spiritual gifts. When dealing with tongues-speaking, he states that its purpose is to be a sign (14:22), and he bases this statement upon an Old Testament passage (Isaiah 28:11, 12) where the Lord told the nation of Israel that He would use “men of other tongues and other lips” (1 Corinthians 14:21) to “speak” to them—“yet for all that will they not hear Me.” This is a reference to God’s disciplining His people by means of the pagan Assyrians. As E. J. Young says in his commentary on the book of Isaiah, “The thought then is that God will speak to Judah by means of people who speak a language different from that of the Jews” (Vol. II, 277–78).

Fourth, tongues-speaking was designed to be a sign to the nation of Israel that God is now accepting Gentiles who trust in Him (1 Corinthians 14:22). As such, tongues-speaking was only in operation during the decades immediately following the Messiah’s coming to earth. Tongues-speaking certainly served this purpose when Jewish Christians had to decide if the Gentile Cornelius and those with him would be accepted by God (Acts 10:44–48).

Fifth, some spiritual gifts clearly were intended by God to be temporary and not permanent. Apostleship, for example, is a part of the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:19,20), and an apostle had to be one who had been an eye-witness to Christ’s earthly ministry (Acts 1:21,22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8–10). Some would even say that Paul was God’s replacement for Judas, and that the number of authentic apostles is limited to twelve (see Revelation 21:14).

Sixth, 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 tells us that spiritual gifts related to revelation would be temporary and would cease once completed revelation had been given.

In light of the above-mentioned survey of biblical evidence, we believe that the New Testament spiritual gift of tongues-speaking was intended by God to be temporary, operating in the foundational stage of the church before the completed revelation of Scripture had been given. Therefore, when someone asks how we explain the present-day phenomenon, it seems to us that the burden of explanation rests with the tongues-author. We may not always know what it is, but we do know what it is not.

3. The so-called Charismatic phenomenon is an experience which adapts to a wide spectrum of doctrinal views, including those of some of the cults (The Shakers and Mormonism, for example), Roman Catholicism, and others. This adaptability certainly ought to make those Charismatics with more traditional evangelical convictions think twice before joining others who differ widely with them regarding the teachings of God’s Word. Genuine Christian experience will always be consistent with what God has told us in Scripture.

4. The Charismatic experience has been used by some to lead people into the Ecumenical Movement. David DuPlessis has documented this trend from its early stages in his book, *The Spirit Bade Me Go*. Ecumenical cooperation has taken place on the local level as well as on the national and international levels because of the Charismatic Renewal Movement.

5. Some who support the tongues movement have said that speaking in tongues is an experience which changes one's Christian life, giving one the power to live victoriously. Yet this is neither the teaching of the Bible nor the experience of believers in New Testament times when it was observed within a local church context, namely in the Corinthian church. Victorious living is possible because of Christ's death and resurrection and is appropriated through yielding to God (Romans 6:1–13)—not through a Charismatic experience. And the Corinthian church where tongues-speaking had been so evident was characterized by carnality (1 Corinthians 3:1–4).

Related to claims for the charismatic experience is the term “full gospel,” used by many who support it. How offensive this is to the Bible believer who by genuine trust in Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (1 Corinthians 15:1–11) has heard the complete gospel! That wonderful message is not lacking because no tongues-speaking occurred. The great Bible passages on salvation do not ever ask us to seek a tongues-speaking experience (John 3:16–18, 36; 5:24; Romans 3:21–28; 5:1; Ephesians 2:8, 9; etc.).

6. We recognize that seeking a Charismatic experience may be the result of genuine longing for spiritual reality on the part of some very earnest people. This, of course, does not make it right, but it does serve as a good reminder to us to make certain that what we teach, how we live our lives, and how we express our love for Christ are biblically balanced. Sometimes a nearly exclusive emphasis upon intellectual content which does not reach down into the reality of a person's life may be the problem. What is the solution? The answer is not found by joining the Tongues Movement nor by de-emphasizing sound Bible doctrine. The answer is to present in our churches and in our own personal lives an aggressive and vibrant Christianity that isn't afraid to reach both head and heart—to show piety and tenderness, as well as (not instead of) teaching doctrinal content from God's Word. And we aren't really helping the charismatic person unless we can show him from our lives and from the Scriptures that seeking an experience is not the ultimate solution. The solution is found in understanding what God's Word teaches, yielding to the Spirit's control in our lives, and living out the victory that is possible because of the death and resurrection of Christ on our behalf.

Bibliography

Much has been written in this area, and the materials listed are only a few of these works. Some of the listed works are older and may not be in print. Some who critique the Word of Faith aspect of the Charismatic Movement may still accept basic Pentecostal theology, so the reader needs to read with discernment.

Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, Editors. Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Regency, 1988. An excellent resource volume covering many aspects and personalities within the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements, written by people who are favorably disposed toward those movements.

Joseph Dillow. Speaking in Tongues—Seven Crucial Questions. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975. Well worth finding and studying.

Thomas R. Edgar. Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today? Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983. A good treatment of the major issues involved in evaluating the present-day movement from a biblical perspective.

Robert G. Gromacki. The Modern Tongues Movement. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1967, 1972. A classic work surveying and evaluating the tongues movement from God's Word.

Hank Hanegraaff. Christianity in Crisis. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1993. A well-researched critique of the Faith movement ("Health & Wealth," "Name It & Claim It" theologies).

Hank Hanegraaff. Counterfeit Revival. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997. A critique of the revival phenomenon characterized by the Toronto Blessing and Pensacola Outpouring movements.

John F. MacArthur, Jr. Charismatic Chaos. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. Deals very well with the doctrinal and practical aspects of the tongues and healing movements.

Ernest Pickering. Charismatic Confusion. Decatur, AL: Baptist World Mission, 1976. This pamphlet and the next one listed by Dr. Pickering are excellent (yet brief) resources which any Christian leader ought to have on hand to give to those who want to understand the tongues movement from a Scriptural perspective.

Ernest Pickering. The Gift of Tongues: What the Bible Says about Speaking in Tongues. Vol. 4, #4 in the ABWE Insight Series. Harrisburg, PA: Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, 1985. An excellent (yet brief) resource.

Merrill F. Unger. New Testament Teaching on Tongues. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1971. A fine treatment of the tongues issue.

George W. Zeller. God's Gift of Tongues: The Nature, Purpose, and Duration of Tongues as Taught in the Bible. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1978. A thoughtful and careful survey of what the Bible teaches about the gift of tongues.

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