

The Truth About Tongues: Part 2

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Introduction:

QUESTION NO. 1 What are the claims of the neo-Charismatic Renewal?

Intro. Neo-Pentecostalism arrived with a force in the latter half of the 20th century.

In traditional Pentecostal churches, among snake handlers, in sophisticated Anglican, Presbyterian, and other Protestant bodies; in the Roman Catholic communion; in Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowships; and in a host of other places, the challenge for charismatic renewal was heralded. The claims of these generally sincere Christians can be summarized in a number of emphases.

The essential premise of the neo-Charismatic movement is that after one has trusted Jesus as Lord and been saved, he or she needs also to receive the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13) which, when it is received, almost invariably is accompanied by the gift of tongues as an authenticating sign, although there are other subsequent uses of this gift to be sure. Some, as we have noted, claim that this distinctive gift of tongues is a "heavenly dialect," the speech of angels (1 Cor. 13:1). Others maintain that it constitutes a known language which the participant has never studied but which God's Spirit bestows (i.e., as clearly seen in the book of Acts). Others would argue that the gift may be either of these.

As a general rule there are basically three primary purposes:

- 1) The experience of tongues serves to authenticate, for both believers and unbelievers, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian.
- 2) Furthermore, it is a thrilling type of experience in which the person loses himself in the Holy Spirit; and as God's power flows through him, he receives personal edification or upbuilding.
- 3) Finally, there are times when one is unable to express to God the desires of the heart due to both human inability and the limitations of vocabulary so that the Spirit must "make intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom. 8:26-27). The Spirit expresses through the believer in a heavenly dialect the heart's prayer to the Father.

Though certain gifts are emphasized more in some groups than in others, the main emphasis is upon tongues in all such groups. This is based upon a limited number of Scriptures, especially in the books of Acts and 1 Corinthians 14.

Christians are led to believe that unless they have had the experience called the "baptism of the Spirit" subsequent to salvation they are actually lost, carnal believers, or at best some type of incomplete Christian, having participated in only a portion of the blessings that God intends for every Christian to experience. Only this post-salvation "baptism" equips the believer to understand and enjoy

completely the mysteries of God and enter into the fulness of His knowledge and blessings. In addition to the citing of various Scriptures, the testimony of countless experiences has been noted as proof of the validity of the baptism. This latter is actually their main line of support.

QUESTION NO. 2 What do the Scriptures teach about neo-Charismatic Renewal?

For the Christian the question of experience must always be judged in the clear light of Scripture. Therefore, we must discover the teaching of the Bible. “Baptism by the Holy Spirit” is not a post-salvation experience but an act of God the Spirit by which the believer is place “in Christ” at the moment of initial repentance and faith (1 Cor. 12:13). The biblical writers knew of numerous “fillings” of the Spirit but only one baptism. These fillings are frequently repeated as a reading of Acts will demonstrate and Ephesians 5:18 affirms.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are special operations of God’s Spirit in the life of the believer which are of varying degrees of importance, though none are unimportant. These are called the pneumatika or “spirituals.” On other occasions they are given the name charismata or “grace gifts.” The terms are synonymous, the first indicating the source of the gifts (the Holy Spirit) and the second indicating the cause of the gifts (God’s sovereign grace).

The gift of tongues is addressed in detail in 1 Cor 14. There are three references to tongues in Acts, the chief of which is the Day of Pentecost experience recorded in Acts 2 (note also chs. 10 and 19; some also think tongues are alluded to in Acts 8:18). The only discussion of tongues in the whole New Testament is in 1 Corinthians 14 (note also references in chs. 12, 13). In Acts 2 there is no question about the nature of the miracle. The confusion of the Tower of Babel is reversed and men of every nation hear Galileans preaching about Jesus in the tongues or languages of their respective countries. The disciples had never formally studied these languages. The Spirit of God worked this miracle in order to present to the multitudes at Pentecost the message of Christ's salvation and to confirm to the Jewish nation the inauguration of the new age in fulfillment of Joel 2. This was a linguistic miracle. Had you been an Arab present for this occasion, God's truth would have been preached to you in Arabic (2:11). The purposes of the miracle in Acts 2 were evangelism and authentication.

Reading back over 1 Corinthians 14:1-25, note the following points about the gift of glossolalia:

1. Tongue in v. 2 is not characterized as "unknown" or "angelic." The word "unknown" in the KJV is in italics in verse 2 and elsewhere. This means that it is not in the Greek manuscript. Its addition in the King James translation has

caused much of the difficulty. Modern version unanimously avoid this unnecessary and harmful addition. Further, the phrase “tongues of angels” in 13:1 is certainly hyperbolic indicating something like “all speech.”

2. Verse 5 indicates that Paul would rather have all to prophesy than to speak in tongues. The church gathered is always to be a place for intelligibility and understanding in worship.
3. Verse 2, 3, 4 and 12 seem to indicate that the emphasis on tongues in Corinthians was not on proclamation but on self-edification. This, however, is contrary to the purpose of the gifts which is to edify the body (14: 5, 12, 17, 19, 26). In light of this, the church should promote the gifts in a way that is constructive for the whole fellowship and thus see to it that tongues are properly regulated for the same purpose.

With these introductory comments, note 4 additional guidelines Paul provides in 14:26-40.

I. The exercise of spiritual gifts is for building up 14:26

Paul is very clear when he said, “Do not forbid speaking in other tongues...” (14:39). Whatever you believe about this gift, it is a legitimate, biblical spiritual gift. We should not denounce the use of the gift, but we must direct the exercise

and practice of it according to biblical guidelines. This gift, like all gifts must be done “for building up” (v. 26)

II. The gift of tongues has specific biblical guidelines 14:27-28

Verses 27-40 lay the boundaries for any use of tongues. Note Paul’s rules:

- a) No more than three are to speak in tongues (v. 27).
- b) Those who speak are to speak one at a time (v. 27).
- c) There must always be an interpreter (v. 27-28).
- d) The result of any spiritual action should be peace, not confusion (v. 33).
- e) Women are not to speak (v. 34).
- f) All things are to be done decently and in order (v. 40).

All these guidelines would demonstrate that the gift of tongues was controllable. It was not a manifestation of the Spirit in which one could not choose to be silent.

Unlike any other gift that is listed in the New Testament, this gift is to be regulated. Why? Verse 33 says it all, “...since God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” (14:33). There was confusion in this church. The worship services were chaotic. Praise had been replaced by pandemonium. Their worship

services at times looked like Grand Central Station in New York on Monday morning—mass confusion.

Where there is confusion you will find the absence of God. God is not the author of confusion or disorder. He is the author of peace and order and purpose. Indeed, even to this very day there is still confusion over this gift. We are confused today for the same reason they were confused two thousand years ago. The gift is misunderstood and misused. This gift had been given a place of prominence in the church when in fact it should not have been. Paul does not hesitate in saying that the gift of prophecy is more productive and fruitful than the gift of tongues particularly without interpretation. What is also clear is that not every Christian has this gift. If one is given the gift, he should make sure it is used properly.

Go back to verse 20, Paul writes, “Brothers and sisters, don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking.” (14:20).

The Corinthians were acting like children. They were at each other’s throat over the gift of tongues. This is not from God. Spiritual gifts were intended by God to bring harmony not disharmony, to bring unity not disunity, to be a rallying point not a dividing line. So what was Paul’s solution?

All the gifts, especially tongues and prophesy, need to be rightly regulated. The gift of tongues must be accompanied by interpretation (v. 28). “But if there is no interpreter, that person is to keep silent in the church and speak to himself and God.” (14:28) Speaking in tongues and interpretation are permanently joined and they are never to be used apart from one another. A speaker should not exercise the gift unless there is someone to interpret the tongues. Further, and this is theologically incorrect in our egalitarian age:

“Women should be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves, as the law also says. If they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, since it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” (14:34-35).

We should not take this verse out of context and teach that a woman could not pray or say anything at all in church. 1 Cor. 11:2-16 makes this perfectly clear. A woman can not only pray, she can also prophesy. Though these verses in 1 Cor. 14 are hotly debated, I think two things are taught. One, women don't speak in tongues in cooperate worship. Two, women don't sit in judgment over prophetic utterances. I agree with Blomberg when he says, “Perhaps the best perspective, therefore, is to take Paul's commands as prohibiting women from participating in the final church decisions about the legitimacy of any give prophecy.” He is surely right when he says that the evaluation of any prophecy

would most likely have been the responsibility of the church leadership, which is exclusively male. (Blomberg, *TNAC*, 281). Carson concurs that in light of the call to submission and obedience to the law that this seems to be the most plausible interpretation. (Carson, *Showing*, 129-131)

As for prophesy: 1) let 2 or 3 speak; 2) the prophets and church leaders judge their words against Scripture and the gospel; 3) speak one at a time, 4) promote learning and encouragement, 5) be submissive to one another (vs 29-33).

IV. God is not a God of confusion but peace 14:33-40

Verse 33 is an overarching principle for all churches.

It fleshes itself out in 3 basic principles for church worship and practice.

1) Women do not judge the prophetic messages when the church is gathered 14:33-35

- The phrase “as the law says” is interesting as there is no specific text cited. Paul probably means this is the general pattern of the Old Testament and consistent with God’s ordained structure of marriage in Genesis 2.

2) Receive with humility and obey the Word of God you have received 14:36-38

3) Exercise spiritual gifts in a decent and orderly fashion 14:39-40

Verse 40 bookends verse 33 in importance.

Concluding Observations

QUESTION #1 Are there dangers in the modern neo-Charismatic movement?

The answer is yes! Some of the common dangers are:

- 1) Emphasis on Charismatic Renewal is very often devastating to the task of evangelism. The excitement of “personal edification” becomes more important than leading people to Christ and helping them avoid eternal punishment (John 3:16; 1 John 2:1-2).
- 2) Doctrinal focus often shifts away from the great doctrinal essentials such as the personal work of Christ and the centrality of the atonement. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit becomes primary and almost exclusive. Some forget that Jesus Himself said in John 16:13 that the ministry of the Holy Spirit would not be to speak of Himself but rather to draw attention to the person and work of Christ. Anything that would focus more on the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts than Jesus and salvation is not from God. Further, it should not go unnoticed that the Lord Himself never spoke in tongues. This is also true of John the Baptist concerning whom Jesus said, “Among those

born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:1; cf. also John 10:41).

- 3) Inherent within glossolalia is the susceptibility to psychological manipulation and demonic influences. Because of its mysterious nature and lack of clarity, tongues are easily initiated either psychologically or by Satan. Tongues has successfully existed in Paganism and in all kinds of pseudo-Christianity. Indeed, tongues as an ecstatic speech predates the time of Christ by at least 1,000 years. Sexual perversion, immorality and aberrant theologies can coexist with tongues as has been demonstrated numerous times. Satan is more easily able to imitate and abuse this gift of tongues than to mimic any of the others, especially when it is wrongly viewed as an ecstatic utterance and not a known language.
- 4) The Charismatic Movement is usually a back door “ecumenism” and as such is exceedingly dangerous. People with totally incompatible views regarding redemption, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the church, and Christ Himself are rallied around the banner of “the baptism of the Spirit” and “the gift of tongues.”
- 5) One of the perpetual difficulties associated with the Charismatic Movement is spiritual pride (1 Cor. 8:1-3). Failure to recognize that not all believers are given the gift of tongues and insistence on the “baptism of the Spirit”

subsequent to the new birth and the accompanying conviction that any believer who hasn't had this "second blessing" is less than complete in Christ leads almost inevitably to spiritual pride.

- 6) "God is the author of peace, not of confusion," according to Paul (1 Cor. 14:33).
- 7) As a rule the Charismatic movement is notoriously parasitic. Often converts to the movement are not from the ranks of unbelievers or even the unchurched. Frequently the devotees have come from among the disgruntled or tenuously attached people in other churches.
- 8) Another weakness related to point No. 2 above, is the overemphasis upon minor aspects of Christianity to the neglect of the very doctrines that need emphasis. Much more attention is given by the New Testament to the doctrines of love, hope, prophecy, evangelism, truth, moral purity, baptism, grace, the atonement of Jesus, etc. than to the subject of spiritual gifts as a whole and particularly tongues.
- 9) Shallow theology and questionable hermeneutical methodology is characteristic of the neo-Charismatics. There is a glaring absence of verse by verse exposition of the Scriptures, expounding of the whole counsel of God's Word, and a full-orbed theology that equally appreciates all of God's revelation.

QUESTION #2 How should individual Christians and local churches respond to the Charismatic, Pentecostal Movement?

The believer must not be uncritically gullible, but neither can he indulge in the luxury of harsh, close-minded criticism. There are some scriptural admonitions which provide an answer to a Christian approach to the Charismatic Movement:

- 1) The believer or a church cannot forbid anyone to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:37). He must recognize that God may give this gift. However, this does not commit the believer to the unbiblical doctrine of a post-salvation “baptism of the Holy Spirit.” It simply means that as a part of His ministry the Holy Spirit may, if He deems it necessary, grant the gift of tongues according to the biblical pattern and for the biblical purposes.
- 2) Whenever tongues are employed, Christians must insist that the experience
 - a) abide by the Pauline rules in 1 Corinthians 14.
 - b) not be divisive
 - c) not become a major emphasis.
- 3) 1 John 4:1 cautions the believer against believing that anything claiming an origin in the Holy Spirit is automatically from that source. We must remember that Satan is the great imitator and the flesh a great deceiver. Satan can produce counterfeit tongues and deceive many. Therefore, we must test the spirits to see if they are from God.

- 4) We must insist that all Christian experience conform to the standards of doctrine and emphases given in God's Word. We must also insist that in any "spiritual experience" the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22-23 be apparent. These are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. Whenever God's Spirit is in control, this fruit will always be produced.
- 5) Every New Testament believer must demand that the whole counsel of God be taught, and that the church emphasizes what the Bible emphasizes. Furthermore, believers and churches must settle for nothing less in the action ministries of their lives than an overwhelming emphasis on evangelism and missions. The Great Commission of our Lord is still binding and clear "—make disciples all of nations (Matt. 28:19-20)." This mission still demands the best energies we have!
- 6) Concerning "prayer tongues" and other private uses of tongues, the Christian would find this generally less objectionable than public demonstrations. Even here, however, there are dangers. Any use of Romans 8:26 to argue for "prayer tongues" is a classic case of subjective eisegesis. The passage plainly states that the Spirit makes intercession for us in a fashion which transcends any kind of utterance.

In fact, since there is no verse in Scripture in which “prayer tongues” are clearly advocated (1 Cor. 14:18-19 being noted), we might well conclude that we would better spend our time expressing to God the things we can; and when human language fails, let it fail completely, allowing the Spirit to express to God our heart’s desires. In this we would join Paul and insist that we “will pray with the spirit and with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

- 7) The believer ought not to be intimidated by neo-Charismatic believers and he should not feel spiritually inferior if he does not have the gift of tongues. Paul has plainly said that other gifts are superior. He also taught that no one individual has all the gifts nor is any one gift for every individual (1 Cor. 12:29-30). Besides, if tongues, or even a post-salvation baptism of the Spirit is a necessity, we will have to cross off the likes of Polycarp, Augustine, Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Calvin, Sattler, Hubmaier, Whitefield, the Wesley’s, Edwards, Spurgeon, Scarborough, Moody, Carroll, Truett, Fuller, Graham, Criswell, and a host of others—God’s great servants who never had this experience.

The Christian perspective is not to forbid tongues—provided these meet the specifications of the New Testament—but to earnestly desire the more important gifts while constantly insisting upon the primacy of the task of

missions and evangelism that was given by Jesus Himself in the Great Commission. All of this is to be done in love—the kind of love expressed in 1 Corinthians 13.

(Portions of this study are from notes by James Merritt and an unpublished article co-authored by Paige Patterson and Danny Akin)