

CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

A Position Statement by The Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary (1976)

Psychological Factors

Modern tongues are explainable as a psychological phenomenon not requiring a miraculous or supernatural source. Speaking in tongues may in some ways be compared with other psychological phenomena such as dreaming. There are definite instances recorded in the Bible when God caused people to dream. This does not prove that dreaming is a supernaturally caused miracle or that God directly causes every dream as a means of revelation. The same statements may be made with regard to tongues. There were occasions in the Apostolic age when God caused people to speak in tongues, but this does not prove that everyone who speaks or claims to speak in tongues has been caused to do so by God.

No Proof of Spirituality

People of all religions and convictions have spoken and are speaking in tongues. The experience is not limited to Christians and certainly not to spiritual Christians. Hindus, Muslims, Shintoists, Buddhists, voodoo practitioners, witch doctors, nice Christians who appear to be spiritual, and "Christians" who are definitely carnal, living in sin, and/or denying essential Christian doctrines, *all* may and do speak in tongues. One who is aware of these facts, even apart from Biblical considerations, on this basis alone, cannot affirm that speaking in tongues automatically proves anything about one's spiritual standing. Due to the current expansion of tongues speaking among even liberals, several tongues groups have recently been forced to conclude that tongues can and do occur apart from the Holy Spirit.

Minor Interpretive Differences

It is recognized that, especially in recent generations, there has been a great deal of confusion and contradictory exegesis of passages relating to this issue--both among proponents and opponents of the movement. Especially with regard to 1 Cor. 13:8-12 there is still a great diversity of opinion. Some have argued that "that which is perfect" (verse 10) refers to the completed canon. It is generally assumed that if this interpretation is valid it limits tongues and all other sign gifts and revelatory gifts to the Apostolic Age--at least as far as the Church Age is concerned. Too often the converse has been assumed, namely, that if "that which is perfect" does *not* refer to the canon, then tongues and the other gifts must remain in operation until the rapture or until the eternal state. This is an invalid conclusion. No matter how one interprets the phrase, "that which is perfect," the text does not affirm that tongues must be in operation until that event. Those who interpret the phrase as referring to the Christian arriving at a mature spiritual stature and those who understand it as referring to the arrival of the perfect or glorified state are by no means required to demand that tongues and other gifts are to continue in operation until any future event. In fact, one's interpretation of "that which is perfect" is not the decisive issue with regard to his understanding of the duration of Spirit-caused tongues. The major point of 1 Cor. 13:8-13 is that the three spiritual gifts (tongues, prophecy, and knowledge) were *temporal* and therefore were

not to be compared in value with the *abiding* and eternal Christian virtues. *These* three, faith, hope, and love, Paul affirms, are to be emphasized and sought in preference to *those* three.

Not only is there a variety of opinion among evangelicals with regard to the interpretation of "that which is perfect," there is also no consensus with regard to the *nature* of the tongues mentioned in the New Testament. These divergent opinions, however, in no way affect the basic question: Are contemporary tongues to be viewed as a legitimate spiritual gift?

The Purpose of Tongues

The determinative issue with regard to the duration of Spirit-caused tongues concerns the *purpose* of the gift. Why did the Holy Spirit cause this experience on the occasions mentioned in the New Testament?

Many have suggested that the gift was intended as a means to edify other believers. But Paul wrote 1 Cor. 14:1-19 in order to say that five plain words would be more profitable for edifying than all the words that could be spoken in tongues. He also stated that the Corinthian glossolalists were not speaking to men, but to God (14:2).

Others have supposed that tongues were given as a means of preaching the gospel to sinners in their own language. But there is never any indication that anyone was ever saved by a message in tongues. On the Day of Pentecost people were saved by Peter's message in clear Aramaic--not by the tongues. Also in Acts 10 and 19 there were no unbelievers present when the Holy Spirit caused people to speak in tongues. 1 Corinthians 14:22 does not suggest that tongues were for preaching the gospel, but that unintelligible speech (tongues) is not the way to address those who are believing what they hear (as illustrated in verses 21 and 23).

Another view is that tongues were given to provide a better means of devotion. But Paul argued that praying with the intellect as well as with the emotions is preferable to emotional fervency alone (1 Cor. 14:14-17). And if tongues provide a better means of devotion, why would the gift *ever* cease? Will we not be expressing devotion to God throughout eternity? Also, according to Mark 16:17 Jesus predicted tongues, not as a devotional aid, but as a *sign*.

Apostolic Signs

A sign is to authenticate. Since tongues were a sign, what did they authenticate? The Biblical answer is that the Holy Spirit caused them as a sign of authentication for the message and ministry of Jesus' chosen proxies--the *Apostles*.

Apostles were foundational for the church (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:28). They were eyewitnesses of the risen Lord (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1). They were personally chosen by Jesus to be revealers of truth and were attested, by sign miracles, as His special agents and spokesmen (Mt. 10:1, 40; Lk. 6:13; Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1). These attesting signs were associated with the apostles and those to whom they personally ministered (Mk. 16:15-20; Acts 2:42-43; 5:11-13; 19:11-12; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). The signs did not occur apart from apostolic contact (Acts 8:14-17).

Paul clearly considered himself to be the last one appointed to the apostolic office (1 Cor. 15:7-8). Speaking in tongues, being bitten by poisonous snakes without harm, miraculously expelling demons, and spectacular supernatural healings were among the signs displayed by the apostles and by those to whom they personally ministered. Whether the apostles themselves or those to whom they ministered did the signs, in either case the signs were to attest the authority of the apostles as revealers of truth (Acts 2:42-43). If all Christians are supposed to perform such deeds they could not have served as the signs of apostleship (2 Cor. 12:12). The signs attested their words as of equal authority with those of Jesus Himself, for He had chosen them as His spokesmen (Mt. 10:11-15, 20, 40; 1 Cor. 14:37).

Differing Body Functions

There is absolutely *no* Biblical basis upon which one may claim that tongues and other signs are caused by the Holy Spirit today. In fact, to do so is to deny what is clearly affirmed by the Scriptures--that is, that these were authenticating signs to confirm the teaching of the apostles. The attempt to prove one's spirituality by seeking for and demonstrating "signs" was viewed by the Apostle Paul as a characteristic of spiritual immaturity (1 Cor. 13:11; 14:20).

The fact that we have all been baptized in one Spirit into one body proves that as individual members of that body we each have our own function(s) and must not all seek to manifest the same spectacular gifts (1 Cor. 12:13ff). The New Testament also affirms that we should not be as concerned about *gifts*, which are temporal (1 Cor. 13:8-12), as about the abiding and eternal character traits and *fruits* of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:22-23).

God Is Still God

The preceding comments are not intended to deny the Scriptural promises such as the one which is given in James 5:14-15. We do affirm that God heals. But we insist, based on the Biblical data, that such healing is not intended as a sign. God normally heals by providential means. The signs done in association with the ministry of Christ and His apostles--as in the other rare periods of concentrated miracles under Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha--were to authenticate revelation then being given. During the tribulation period when God will again be giving revelation through His prophets, there will again be authenticating signs (Rev. 11:3-6). Signs to authenticate such revelation must be, as with our Lord and His apostles, abundant, spectacular, and undeniable, even by opponents. To the contrary, the contemporary "signs" are readily deniable by most impartial observers and are easily explainable in psychological and psychosomatic terminology. The fact that numerous scholars, both Christian and non-Christian, have carefully examined modern glossolalia and healing claims without finding any necessarily miraculous phenomena should establish this point.

Conclusion

It is our conclusion, then, that while we may acknowledge that the Holy Spirit has worked in some charismatics, this is not *because* of tongues; rather, it is in spite of their misunderstanding of the Biblical references to tongues. It is sinful to teach that this experience should be sought by

Christians as a sign of divine approval or of spiritual achievement. Therefore, while we must and do love our charismatic friends, we cannot commend or support any propagation of this unbiblical teaching.

(Adopted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary,
March 10, 1976)