

SPEAKING IN TONGUES AS SEEN THROUGH THE HOLY BIBLE

The ability to speak in tongues or in languages which one had never learned was one of the gifts which God Almighty used to propagate the gospel in the early days of Christianity.

Due to ignorance, it has become the norm these days for Churches to stake their credibility on their ability to speak in tongues. The Church leaders contend that all Christians must speak, pray or sing in new tongues as evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. They contend that speaking in tongues gives one a “hotline to heaven” and that such prayers cannot be “intercepted” by the devil. So strong is the obsession with speaking in tongues otherwise known as *glossolalia* that even new converts to these Churches are these days being taught how to speak in tongues! Instead of saying what people can understand, what they utter are, as the *Blacks Bible Dictionary* puts it, nothing but “inarticulate, unintelligible speech, meaningless sounds, jargon ...” — page 768

Origin

Religious historians agree that the practice of speaking in tongues is an ancient one. According to *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* speaking in tongues has been practiced through the ages in various religious settings, both Christian and non-Christian, by individuals in private as well as by whole communities. It states: “Practitioners of ancient pagan religions believed that speaking in tongues was a sign of the active presence of the gods. Thus whenever the oracle of Delphi became inspired, she would speak in tongues as an evidence of supernatural illumination.” The authors add: “This interpretation of glossolalia as divine activity has been accepted (by people) as diverse as medieval mystics, Huguenot sectarians and oriental religionists such as the Moslem Dervishes.” (Volume 4 1997 edition page 2076) Other practitioners of the art are said to include the Jansenists, the Camisard of Cevennes, the Irvingites, and during American revivals of the frontier days. “It may still be seen at meetings of Pentecostals, Holy Rollers, and other highly emotional groups.” —page 768.

However the type of “speaking in tongues” practised in these religions and groups the *Blacks Bible Dictionary* points out, is no more than “a flow of unintelligible sounds that transcend the usual processes of verbal communication”. It adds “Because the sounds uttered ...do not constitute intelligible language, they need interpretation (not translation) in order to be of use to the hearers.” Evidently what the Pentecostals now call “speaking in tongues” is akin to what the pagans were practising in their ancient religions.

Wrong Views

One of the Scriptures some religious groups cite as their authority for the teaching that

God is still moving people to speak tongues in these last days is Mark 16:17,18. It says: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" Commenting on this text, Ellen G. White states in his book, *Desire of Ages* "The disciples were to preach among other nations, and they would receive power to speak other tongues. The Savior's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers to the end of time." (pages 810 – 811) However people who take this as their authority ignore verse 20 which says: "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen." This shows that the signs Jesus spoke of has already fulfilled. It should be understood that this was intended to boost the growth of the Church in her infancy and it served the purpose for which it was intended as shown also by the words of apostle Peter, to wit: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women. Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one" (Acts 5:12,14-16. See also Acts 19:11,12.

Pentecost

The major point referred to those who claim to speak in tongues today is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost. On that day, the Apostles of Jesus Christ received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. This was a fulfilment of the promise of Jesus Christ to send the Holy Spirit which he also called the Comforter, the Teaching Spirit or the Spirit of Truth. (John 14:16-18, 26; 15:26; Acts 1:5,9). The Pentecost is held 50 days after the Passover, the time of Christ's crucifixion. It commemorates the old Jewish festival of First Fruits and, according some authorities, is also kept by the Jews in remembrance of the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai. (See *The Lions Handbook to the Bible* page 551, *The Illustrated National Holy Bible* [commentary])

While the disciples were assembled waiting for the fulfilment of the promise which Jesus Christ had given them there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind and there alighted on the apostles cloven tongues of fire as a result of which they "began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance".

The account further states: " And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 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 Judaea, 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. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter,

standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel." Acts 2:1-16

It is clear from the foregoing that contrary to what obtains in the pagan religions and among the Churches today, the audience understood what the apostles were saying on the day of Pentecost as they spoke in the hearers' own languages.

That only 12 men, the apostles, received the anointing spirit of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day is an indisputable fact. It is also worthy to note that no female disciple spoke in tongues, as seen from what some of the eyewitnesses mockingly said of the Apostles "These men are full of new wine." (Verse 13) The prophecy of Joel the prophet fulfilled on the day of Pentecost on the apostles of Jesus Christ who were the foundation members of the Anointed Christians who constitute the body-members of Christ. They are called "Daughters of Zion" (Zechariah 9:9); Sons of God (1 John 3:2; Virgins (Revelation 14:1-5) However the gift of speaking in tongues, has ceased because it was not meant to last beyond the early stage of Christianity. It was useful during the establishment of the early Church. After a while it ceased. Said St. Paul: "Whether there be tongues they shall cease" – 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Some professed Christians contend that it is wrong to relegate the relevance of the gift of speaking in tongues to the apostolic age on the basis of 1 Corinthians 13:8 "whether there be tongues, they shall cease" insisting that the gift was meant to last for ever. They argue further that if such interpretation were true, then St. Paul's other statement, also in verse 8, "whether there be knowledge they shall vanish away" (verse 8) would also mean that "knowledge was valid only for the apostles time." *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* – volume 4 1997 edition edited by Walter A. Elwell. This argument is valid. What St. Paul was saying was that speaking in tongues and the craving for knowledge will be only for a time. As earlier indicated, the phase of speaking in tongues has ended with the early Church. The quest for knowledge will also end as perfection comes in God's kingdom. In God's Kingdom there will be no need for teachers, as all would have knowledge of God. God said: "And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest" (Hebrews 8:11; see also Jeremiah 31:31-34). The prophet Isaiah further stated: The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9). On this score we agree with William Smith L.L.D. that the "gifts of the day of Pentecost belonged to a critical epoch, not to the continuous life of the Church." – *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (January 1999 edition)

Gifts of Spirit

The Holy Bible clearly shows that speaking in tongues is one of several gifts of the Spirit which God gives to His worshippers. St. Paul enumerated some of the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-12. In verses 28-31, he showed that as there are different offices and spiritual gifts in the church so are the believers endowed with diverse gifts (1 Corinthians 12:13) The apostle further said: "For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." – 1 Corinthians 7:7.

Emphasising the superior merits of the gifts of charity and expounding of the truth to the understanding of the believers, St. Paul placed speaking in tongues at the bottom of a list of gifts of the Holy Spirit arranged by decreasing order of importance. (1 Corinthians 12: 28; 1 Corinthians 13: 1,3-5, 13) The manifestation of the spirit of God in one is not by speaking in tongues but by the fruits of the new man – character and behaviour change – that are seen in the person.

St. Paul did not recommend speaking in tongues as a gift to be coveted by believers. He made it clear that it is not an indispensable element of Christian worship as it was unprofitable to speak in tongues which the audience could not understand. He said: "I thank my God, I speak with

tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (1 Corinthians 14:19-23). As St. Paul so aptly observed, anyone seeing the rowdy spectacle of several people babbling some incomprehensible gibberish as is common with some Churches today, will not fail to reach the same conclusion as St. Paul.

It is an indisputable fact of the Scriptures ended with the early Church and that it is not a requirement for salvation. Speaking in tongues is not a badge of spirituality or piety and therefore should not be boastfully paraded as such. The principal mark of a true servant of God is the preaching and practice of the Truth – not ability to speak in tongues. – Proverbs 14:5,25; John 8:31,32.