

**SPEAKING  
IN  
TONGUES:**

**WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?**

*By*

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this booklet is to provide the reader with a thorough, *Biblical* understanding of the nature of “tongues” as discussed throughout the Bible. Since most erroneous teachings on tongues fall into error due to the human tendency to add to or take away from the scriptures, we will seek to stay with the Biblical record in our examination. No assumptions will be made from the text that are not clearly stated.

It is my sincere desire that you will receive the contents of this booklet with an open mind, and study the scriptures themselves to determine if these things are indeed so.

### Does God use tongues to communicate with man?

The first explicit mention of tongues in the Bible is found in Isaiah 28:11:

*11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.  
12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. (Isaiah 28:11-12)*

Some will argue that the stammering lips and another tongue referred to in this passage speak of a day when preachers would preach to nations other than their own in other languages. There are two problems with this theory:

- The “people” in verse 11 refers to the Jews (see verses 1, 3, 5, and 7 of the same chapter). Therefore, the “stammering lips and another tongue” must refer to Gentile preachers and languages, if this theory is true. But why preach to Jews in any language other than their native tongue? Even if a foreign missionary was to be used, he/she would speak the native language, not another tongue.
- Most important, good biblical scholarship always allows the Bible to interpret itself when possible, and the Apostle Paul specifically interprets Isaiah 28:11-12 for us in his discourse on the proper use of the gift of tongues and interpretation in I Corinthians 14:21 and 22:

*21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.*

*22 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.*

So Paul, by his own definition, proves that the tongues of Isaiah 28 are indeed the same tongues of I Corinthians 14, which clearly refers to the supernatural exercise of tongues. Note also that *men of* is italicized in I Corinthians 14:21 in the King James text. This means the words were added (erroneously, I might add) by the translators, and were not part of the original text. The translation *should* read:

*“...With other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people...”*

This translation is perfectly in harmony with Paul’s interpretation of Isaiah 22.

### Why did God choose to use tongues at all?

First, it is important to understand that God can do whatever He wishes, and does not need to explain His reasons to us. That said, there are at least two logical reasons for using tongues to communicate with man:

- Since the tongue is the most unruly member of the body, to surrender it to God means you have truly surrendered everything. Only when you are totally repentant and submitted to God’s will for your life will you speak in tongues. Man cannot tame the tongue; only God can.

*But the tongue can no man tame; {it is} an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:8)*

- The second reason for tongues is that man-made languages may not be adequate to express praise or prayer requests to God:

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)*

Contrary to some doctrines, nowhere does the Bible teach that tongues **must** be man-made, recognizable languages. In fact, there are earthly languages (tongues of men), and heavenly languages (tongues of angels):

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1)*

It is certainly true that in Acts chapter two, the tongues were known languages, for the Bible is clear about this. In our own time, there are numerous cases of individuals who have spoken in a known, recognizable language (but one they never learned) when they received the Holy Ghost or in praise to God. However, the Bible does not tell us that the tongues of Acts 10 and Acts 19 were known languages, and in fact suggests otherwise, since there is no mention of interpreters. The fact that the Bible confirms that there are tongues of angels (heavenly languages) proves that tongues do not necessarily have to be in man-made languages.

Further proof that there are heavenly languages is found in both Genesis 1:3 and throughout the book of Revelation. In Genesis 1:3, where the scriptures tell us that "God said, 'Let there be light'," man-made languages did not yet exist, for man himself did not exist. What language, then, did God speak when He spoke light into existence? How did He communicate with angelic beings, which were created prior to man? It is preposterous to claim that God spoke English or French or German at this time.

Throughout the book of Revelation, examples are given of God and the angels speaking to each other and to the saints in heaven. Are we to believe that all of this communication is done via earthly languages? Are God and His heavenly angels bound by our languages? How will all of the saved out of every nation communicate with each other in heaven? Will a language barrier still exist, or will there be one, universal heavenly language so that saints from China can communicate freely with saints from South America? These questions may seem trivial, but isn't it just as trivial to try to discredit speaking in tongues solely on the basis of whether the tongues are a known, earthly language or not?

Another possible use of a heavenly language to communicate with man is found in Daniel chapter 5. In this chapter king Belshazzar and his lords are having a party when a hand begins to write on the wall. None of the wise (learned) men of the kingdom can interpret the writing, suggesting that it was in a language unknown to men at that time. Had it been a common language, such as Chaldean or Hebrew, someone in the kingdom could have read it. However, only the prophet Daniel was ultimately able to interpret the writing through the supernatural power of God's Spirit.

Put simply, it is man's pride and arrogance that causes him to insist that tongues must be in man-made languages. He cannot resist the tendency to exalt the creature above the Creator.

### **What about scientific studies of people who speak in tongues?**

Some have suggested the existence of so-called "scientific" studies in which individuals were studied as they spoke in tongues. The tongues were then compared with all known languages, and found not to match any earthly language.

There are several problems with such "studies." To begin with, we have already proven that there is no Biblical requirement that tongues must be in a known, earthly language. Second, there are literally thousands of languages and dialects that are now dead (lost and haven't been used for centuries or even millennia), so such a person could in fact be speaking one of these languages supernaturally. Finally, to study a small group of individuals and use this study as a basis to discredit all tongues is ludicrous. There are literally millions of people who supposedly speak in tongues. It is my opinion that in many such cases the tongues are, indeed, uninspired. Many people speak in tongues because they hear someone else, are pressured, want attention, etc. In such cases, it is not as "the Spirit gives the utterance." I would not be surprised if 75% or more of the "tongues" exercised in the religious world are false. However, **this does not invalidate the Bible!** We cannot, as the saying goes, "throw the baby out with the bath water." God will not be intimidated by Satan's attempts to use trickery or sensationalism to discredit Him. He will still speak to His people as He chooses.

### **How are tongues used in the Bible?**

- The tongues which are a sign to the unsaved that he has received the Holy Ghost.
- Worshiping, or praying, in tongues (communication between God and man).
- The *gift* of tongues and interpretation.

Each of these cases will be discussed further.

### **Tongues are one sign (though not the only sign) of a believer.**

*And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; (Mark 16:17)*

All 120 present in the upper room on the day of Pentecost spoke in tongues as they were filled with the Holy Ghost:

- 1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*
- 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and*

*it filled all the house where they were sitting.*

*3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

*4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)*

The infilling was not selective; everyone spoke with tongues, and it was as the **Spirit** gave them utterance. Any attempt to classify tongues as of the devil is dangerously close to blaspheming the Spirit, since it is the Spirit which gives the utterance in true tongues. Jesus warned of this when the Pharisees accused him of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub (see Matthew 12:24-32). Any attempt to associate the work of God with Satanic influence falls under the category of blasphemy. Of course, there have been numerous abuses of the power to speak in tongues, just as there have been abuses of God's Word, teachings on faith, etc. However, we do not discount the Word of God or faith because they have been abused, and neither should we discount all tongues because of abuses.

Since the **Spirit** gave them utterance, we again see God using tongues to communicate with man. The 120 were praising God in tongues.

*11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:11)*

Thus we see that tongues are not a one-way communication, with God speaking to man, but a two-way communication, with man praising God in tongues.

We have identified at least two uses of tongues thus far:

- Tongues used by God to speak to man (Isaiah 28:11)
- Tongues used by man to praise God (Acts 2:11)

Those who received the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost were acting strange enough to be perceived as drunk:

*Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. (Acts 2:13)*

Behavior which may seem strange or "drunken" to those who have never experienced the Holy Ghost is actually quite biblical.

## **But I've been told that tongues were used on the Day of Pentecost to preach to the crowds. Isn't this what happened?**

One common misconception about the tongues of Pentecost in Acts chapter two is that the purpose was to preach to all the people of different languages present at Jerusalem. There are three problems with this theory:

- Those present were all Jews or Jewish converts (proselytes) who had come to celebrate Pentecost, and could probably all speak Greek, the universal language of the day. Thus, only one language would have been necessary.
- As has been previously stated, the bystanders in Acts 2 accused the disciples of being drunk. If, as has been theorized, the disciples were simply preaching to the crowd in their own language, this would not have been perceived as drunkenness. The crowd may have mocked them or ignored them, but would not likely have accused them of drunkenness.
- Peter, who actually preached the sermon (the others speaking in tongues were praising God), lifted up his **own** voice, proving it was not necessary to speak in tongues to communicate with the crowd:

*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: (Acts 2:14)*

Others attempt to explain away the fact that Peter preached alone by saying his voice was miraculously translated for the multitude. Not only does this explanation add something to scripture that is simply not there (a very dangerous practice – see Revelation 22:18), it fails to explain the reasons for the tongues in chapters ten and nineteen of Acts. It is evident that the tongues of Acts 10 were a sign to the bystanders that Cornelius and his household had received the Holy Ghost:

*45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

*46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, (Acts 10:45-46)*

It is ludicrous to say that the tongues of Cornelius and his household were used to preach to anyone, for Peter had to preach to them! This single passage is devastating to another erroneous notion, one that states that the tongues of the first century A.D. were a miraculous way of receiving a message from God in the absence of the written Word. Those who hold this position attempt to say that tongues ceased after the canon of holy scripture was complete. *Why, then, did Cornelius and his household speak in tongues?* Peter, one of the writers of the canon, was present to preach, and had already preached to them! The only logical need for tongues in this case was as a sign of the Holy Ghost.

The disciples of John in Acts 19 were baptized believers, yet did not have the Holy Ghost. Furthermore, they spoke in tongues when they received the Holy Ghost:

*1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,  
2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.  
3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.  
4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.  
5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.  
6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. (Acts 19:1-6)*

**There are only five cases in the Bible that describe historical accounts of people who did not have the Holy Ghost receiving the Holy Ghost for the first time during the church age, that is, on the day of Pentecost or after. There are other cases where the Bible says certain individuals *believed*, but none that specifically say they received the Holy Ghost. These five are as follows:**

- **The 120 on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2**
- **The household of Cornelius in Acts 10**
- **The disciples of John in Acts 19**
- **Paul in Acts 9**

- **The Samaritans of Acts 8**

**In the first three cases, the we have already seen that the Bible clearly states that the individuals spoke in tongues. In one of the other two, that of Paul's conversion, the Bible does not tell us in the account in Acts that Paul spoke in tongues. However, the Bible does tell us that Paul did in fact speak in tongues:**

*I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: (1 Corinthians 14:18)*

Some attempt to explain this verse by saying Paul is talking about the many different languages he had learned. It is true that Paul probably spoke at least five languages, but that has nothing to do with this verse. This entire chapter (1 Corinthians 14) is devoted to a discourse on the *supernatural* gift of tongues. This supernatural gift is Paul's subject in this verse as well.

**Now let's take a look at the Samaritans of Acts 8, another case that does not explicitly mention tongues. The Samaritans of Acts 8:**

Had Christ preached unto them:

*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. (Verse 5)*

Gave heed (paid attention to) those things which Philip preached, heard miracles, and saw miracles:

*And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. (Verse 6)*

Had unclean spirits cast out of them, and were healed:

*For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. (Verse 7)*

Had great joy:

*And there was great joy in that city. (Verse 8)*

Believed Philip's preaching and were baptized:

*But when they believed Philip preaching*

*the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Verse 12)*

And received the Word of God:

*Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: (Verse 14)*

Virtually all mainline denominations today would say the Samaritans were saved at this point. However, the Bible says that they **still did not have the Holy Ghost!**

*15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:*

*16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) (Acts 8:15-16)*

Thus we know that none of the following is proof that the Holy Ghost dwells within you:

- Giving heed to the Word
- Believing
- Seeing miracles
- Having devils cast out of you
- Having joy
- Being baptized
- Receiving the Word of God

**Key question #1: How did the disciples know that the Samaritans did not have the Holy Ghost???**

If the Holy Ghost is received by simply accepting Christ as your personal savior, then surely the disciples would have seen that these people had it. However, *both the disciples and the Samaritans knew that they (the Samaritans) did not have the Holy Ghost!* There was obviously a visible sign (or lack thereof), something that clearly indicated that these people did not have the Holy Ghost.

The next critically important point found in Acts 8 is the fact that the Samaritans received a *visible* experience, something far beyond merely accepting Christ as savior:

*17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

**Key Question #2: How did the Samaritans and/or Apostles and/or Simon the sorcerer know that they had**

**received the Holy Ghost?**

*18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. (Acts 8:17-19)*

It is evident that Simon *saw* something, for he was willing to pay money for the power to bestow it. Furthermore, Simon was not easily fooled. He was a magician and a master at sleight of hand. He, of all people, would be skeptical of *any* experience received by the Samaritans; yet he saw something that he could not explain. While the Bible does not tell us what this visible experience was, the only other visible experience common in each passage in Acts is that of speaking in tongues.

**How does the Gift of Tongues differ from tongues of praise and worship or the evidence of the Holy Ghost?**

Many confuse the gift of tongues, which is the primary subject of discussion in I Corinthians 14, with the tongues spoken when a person receives the Holy Ghost or tongues of praise and worship. While there is strong Bible evidence to suggest that all who received the Holy Ghost in the early church spoke in tongues, it is equally clear that not everyone possesses the gift of tongues. Even though a person may not possess the gift of tongues, he can still worship God in tongues, and this is clear from I Corinthians 14, which shall be discussed in detail in this section.

It is an interesting observation that those who appeal to I Corinthians 14 in order to “regulate” those who speak in tongues usually have **never** spoken in tongues themselves, nor have they ever heard anyone speak in tongues in their local church. Often they are criticizing something they do not understand. Since it is clear from I Corinthians 14 that tongues were very much a part of the early church, why do these people **never** utilize this tool?

In the following section we will examine I Corinthians 14 verse by verse.

*14:1 Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.*

This verse is certainly **not** prohibiting the exercise of tongues or any other spiritual gift, but simply establishing that the anointed, preached Word (prophecy) is more important than all other gifts. The Greek word for

“prophesy” is *propheteuo*, which means “to speak under inspiration.” In other words, the gift of tongues should never supercede or interfere with the inspired, preached Word. To use this verse to condemn tongues, one must also use it to condemn the six other spiritual gifts (faith, healings, miracles, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and discerning of spirits), for **all** are less important than prophecy.

*2 For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.*

Note in particular that the one speaking in tongues speaks *to God*. Once more, to suggest that speaking in tongues is “of the devil” is dangerously close to blasphemy, since the Bible warns us that the speaker speaks *to God*. This verse also says “*no man understandeth him.*” What further proof do we need that tongues need not be a known, earthly, man-made language? If the tongue was man-made, it could not be said that no man understands him.

In addition, this verse clearly disproves the notion that all who speak in tongues must do so for the edification of the church and that there must be an interpreter present, as well as the notion that tongues in the early church were used exclusively for preaching to others in foreign languages, and never for the personal edification of the individual. This is a clear cut example of praising God in tongues. The speaker is speaking to God, in a language unknown to anyone, without an interpreter, mysteries unknown to him or anyone else, and it is all *in the Spirit*, not “of the devil,” as some suggest. Nothing here condemns speaking to God in tongues.

*3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*

*4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*

This is why prophecy (preaching) is superior to *tongues of worship*; tongues of worship edify an individual, but not the church as a whole. Again, *there is nothing in this verse* (or any verse, for that matter) *to condemn tongues of worship!* On the contrary, verse 4 tells us the speaker edifies himself, much like the person who prays privately edifies himself. There is nothing wrong with private prayer which edifies the individual, but public prayer which disrupts the preaching of the Word would be out of order. Likewise, private tongues of praise and worship in the

Spirit are never out of order, but can be disruptive if used unwisely.

*5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.*

Here Paul expresses his desire that everyone spoke with tongues! This is a far cry from churches which discourage or even prohibit speaking in tongues. Such churches are out of harmony with the apostle. He again reiterates the fact that preaching is superior to tongues, *unless the tongues are the gift of tongues followed by interpretation!* This is a very important, often overlooked, point: The gift of tongues, when interpreted, **is not inferior to prophecy!**

*6 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine?*

Of course, Paul is not suggesting that he did not speak in tongues, since he clearly said he spoke in tongues more than anyone in verse 18. He is simply reemphasizing the point that his personal tongues of praise and worship benefitted no one but himself.

*7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped?*

*8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?*

*9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.*

Once more, Paul emphasizes the need for a clear message to the people.

*10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.*

*11 Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.*

The word translated “barbarian” here is the Greek word *barbaros*, which simply means “foreigner.” It is not used in the New Testament as an insult, but simply to designate those who spoke a different language.

*12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*

*13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.*

This verse clearly refutes two erroneous teachings:

- That “tongues” in the New Testament referred to foreign languages *learned* by the speaker to preach to foreign peoples. In such a case, the speaker would need no interpreter; he would be preaching in the language of the locals, the language he had learned.
- That “tongues” in the NT was some *miraculous* ability to preach to foreigners in their own language, though unlearned by the speaker. Again, such a miraculous “gift” would need no interpretation.

*14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.*

So we see the purpose of praying or worshiping in tongues: the human spirit communicates with God. Once again, *nothing in this verse condemns speaking in tongues!* Prayer or worship in tongues takes place when the individual is *in the spirit*.

*15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.*

Once more proving praying in tongues is normal and appropriate. Since Paul already stated that praying in the spirit referred to individual prayer and worship to God (verse 14), he places his seal of approval on such prayer in verse 15. Singing in the spirit (in tongues) is also approved, and all of this is different from the gift of tongues and interpretation. The only restriction on tongues of praise and worship is that they not interfere with the preaching of the Word and that everything be done decently and in order.

*16 Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the*

*room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest?*

*17 For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.*

*18 I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all:*

*19 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.*

We have seen nothing yet in this chapter which forbids speaking in tongues of praise and worship to God on an individual basis. We have, in fact, established that such tongues are almost always appropriate. We have also established that such tongues should **never** supercede the preached Word **unless** they are interpreted. Some use the phrase “in the church” in the preceding verse to teach that tongues are not appropriate “in the church.” Such an interpretation, however, ignores the context of the entire chapter. The entire chapter is devoted to the proper exercise of the gift of tongues and interpretation *in the church*. Even in the preceding verse, Paul does not condemn speaking in tongues *in the church* without an interpreter. He is simply reemphasizing the preeminence of the preached Word over tongues of praise and worship. He clearly prefers preaching to speaking in tongues.

Interestingly, those who use this verse to silence tongues in the church almost never speak in tongues anywhere else, either. Why is this so? Is it because they fear something they do not understand and have never experienced?

*20 Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.*

*21 In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.*

Paul interprets Isaiah 28:11-12 for us, proving that Isaiah is speaking prophetically of tongues, not of missionaries preaching in foreign languages, as some teach.

*22 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.*

We must examine this verse very closely, as it has

enormous significance to the subject of the evidence of the Holy Ghost. **Is Paul saying that a) a believer who speaks in tongues has given a sign to an unbeliever, or b) that when a non-Christian speaks in tongues, this is a sign to that non-Christian that he or she has received the Holy Ghost?** Tongues spoken by a Christian *cannot* be a valid sign to an unbeliever, because the unbeliever would naturally be skeptical of the authenticity of the tongues. How would he know that the tongues are legitimate? The only way tongues can truly be a sign to a non-Christian is for the non-Christian *himself* to speak in tongues. Such a person would then **know** the authenticity of the tongues. So tongues are a sign to a non-Christian of the presence of God in his or her life. They serve the purpose (as they did in Acts 8 to the Samaritans and in Acts 10 to the household of Cornelius) of providing a visible sign of the Holy Ghost to those who have repented of their sins and believed the gospel.

*23 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?*

Once more, we must take this verse in context with the rest of the chapter. How can we reconcile this verse with verse 22, which says tongues are for a sign “to them that believe not”? The verse seem to contradict one another, with verse 22 promoting tongues as a sign to unbelievers (non-Christians), yet verse 23 warns of the impact of tongues on these same unbelievers! This apparent contradiction vanishes when we understand that in verse 22 Paul is saying that tongues are a sign to an unbeliever *when he or she speaks in tongues!* However, if the entire church family is speaking in tongues all at once, it may serve as a hindrance to a non-Christian who does not understand. No other interpretation can reconcile these two verses.

Thus far, tongues of praise and worship have been approved (see verses 2, 4, 5, 14, 15, and 18), *without* an interpreter. The key word in this verse (23) is *all*. Unless prophecy (the anointed, preached Word) goes forth, the service is of no use to the unbeliever.

*24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all:  
25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*

So there are two signs to unbelievers of the power of God:

- When the unbeliever speaks in tongues (verse 22).
- When the secrets of the unbeliever’s heart are revealed through inspired utterance (preaching, a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, etc.).

*26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

All spiritual gifts (but not necessarily personal praise and worship, which may also be in tongues) are to be exercised for the good of the church body.

*27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.*

*28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

To properly understand and interpret the preceding two verses, one must have thoroughly studied the first twenty-six verses in this chapter. By this point, we have clearly established that personal tongues of praise and worship are acceptable and proper. Verse 27 is allowing the exercise of *the gift* of tongues at most three times in a service, and not all at the same time. There must also be an interpreter for the *gift* of tongues to continually be exercised. In churches where the Holy Spirit moves through tongues and interpretation on a regular basis, there is absolutely nothing mysterious about these verses. When the *gift* of tongues is exercised (*not* the normal tongues of praise and worship), everything in the service shuts down. All music is silenced, all prayer stops, no one else speaks. Obviously, such a manifestation of the Spirit would be disruptive without an interpretation. When verse 28 tells the speaker to keep silence unless an interpreter is present, it also tells him to speak to himself. This simply means in a low tone of voice, not loudly. “To himself, and to God” is best understood when compared to a man or woman walking down a highway talking to themselves. Their lips may move, an audible sound may come out, but they are speaking to themselves. This is *not* necessarily totally silent.

*29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.*

*30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.*

*31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*

32 *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.*

33 *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

34 *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*

This can be compared with someone with the gift of tongues keeping silence. Women were allowed to pray and prophesy (see I Corinthians 11:5), so Paul is not referring to total silence here, but simply respectful obedience and propriety. Likewise, tongues of praise and worship were permitted, but in order and at the proper time

35 *And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

36 *What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?*

37 *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.*

38 *But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

39 *Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.*

This is one of the clearest commands in scripture: *forbid not to speak with tongues*. Any teacher or preacher who forbids others to speak with tongues or teaches against tongues is in direct violation of God's Word. Such a preacher or teacher is deliberately **refusing** a potential message from God through tongues (Isaiah 28:11-12, I Corinthians 14:5).

40 *Let all things be done decently and in order.*

This is a summary of the entire chapter. As long as tongues are used properly and as designed by God, for a message from God (the gift of tongues and interpretation), or through non-disruptive praise and worship, they are in order.

### **How about the teaching that tongues are no longer in operation in the church today?**

This argument stems from the teaching that only the

apostles and members of the early church had certain gifts, that these gifts were necessary for the propagation of the gospel until the Bible was completed, and that with the death of the apostles and the completion of the Bible these gifts ceased. In an attempt to validate this theory, some of its proponents declare the purpose of tongues was to "miraculously" preach to the heathen in their own language. Some problems with this theory:

- If this is so, who was Cornelius and his household preaching to in Acts 10:46 after they heard the message of Peter and began speaking in tongues? What purpose did their speaking in tongues serve?
- Who were the disciples of John preaching to in Acts 19:6 after they heard the message of Paul and began speaking in tongues? What purpose did their speaking in tongues serve?
- If the purpose of tongues was to empower the Apostles (and others) to miraculously preach in foreign languages, why would an interpreter **ever** be needed? If a preacher is preaching in the language of the locals, he doesn't need an interpreter. So why the need for an interpreter in I Corinthians 14?
- If the purpose of tongues was to preach to the heathen, then they would certainly be just as needful today, with a world population of over 5 billion. Why would tongues cease?
- If tongues ceased at the end of the apostolic age, with the completion of the Biblical canon, then *God inspired an entire chapter (I Corinthians 14) that has absolutely no application to the church today!* If this is true, we could legitimately tear I Corinthians 14 from our Bibles, because none of the guidelines apply, since tongues no longer exist! Why would God include a chapter in His Word that dealt with a problem that would no longer exist after His Word came? Are we to believe that for 1900 years a full chapter of the Bible is wasted? Some may argue that God included such a chapter because He knew that there would be tongue-talking Pentecostals around in our day and they would need to be regulated. But keep in mind that while the chapter *regulates* the use of tongues, it does not forbid them and even commands us *not* to forbid them. Why regulate something that supposedly doesn't exist?

There is only one verse (discussed later) used to justify this position, and a simple reading of this verse will demonstrate that this interpretation is erroneous. There is little supporting scripture to back up the doctrine, and in the absence of two or three witnesses, God's standard by which every word is to be established (see Matthew 18:16

and II Corinthians 13:1), it certainly cannot be supported.

Let's look at the passage used to support the theory that tongues are not a valid manifestation of the Spirit today. This passage is found in I Corinthians 13:

*8 Charity never faileth: but whether {there be} prophecies, they shall fail; whether {there be} tongues, they shall cease; whether {there be} knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

*9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.*

*10 But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

*11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*

*12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.*

Those who use verse 8 to justify the “ceasing” of tongues for our age never point out that the same verse predicts that prophecies will fail and knowledge will vanish away. No reasonable individual would claim that prophecies are failing. In fact, they are coming true in our time at a record pace. No reasonable individual would claim that knowledge has vanished away – on the contrary, we are overwhelmed with knowledge. This is the “information age.” We can safely conclude, then, that tongues will cease when prophecies fail and knowledge vanishes. All of this will occur when there is no more need for any of the three, that is, when time ends and eternity begins. When Jesus returns for His church, there will be no more need for tongues, prophecy, or knowledge.

The error from which this doctrine originates is usually made in interpreting the phrase, “when that which is perfect is come.” Those who would like to believe that tongues have ceased teach that “that which is perfect” refers to the Bible. However, in verse 9, Paul, one of the apostles and the inspired writer of much of the New Testament, says, “we know in part, and we prophesy in part.” Since Paul is referring to his own prophecies and knowledge, his writings in the New Testament, how could the Bible be “that which is perfect”? He is admitting that his knowledge and prophecy is incomplete. By using the phrase, “that which is perfect” Paul is not suggesting that the Bible is imperfect, for the Greek word translated “perfect” is

*teleios*, which means “complete” or “full”. He is in essence saying that our knowledge of God, even with the Bible, is incomplete and will never be perfect until we reach heaven. No one would claim that he or she knows everything about God or His ways, so how can we claim to have perfect knowledge?

Paul is very clear here about what he is referring to: heaven. He has interpreted the entire passage for us. ***It is essential to allow the Bible to interpret itself, when possible!*** No matter how bad some would like for this passage to suggest that the “perfect” thing is the Bible and that the “in part” things are the gifts of the Spirit, Paul is clear in this one verse: He, the writer of much of the New Testament, *knew only in part!* His prophecies (New Testament writings) were *in part*. Yet he spoke of a day when he would know *face to face*, and as he was known by God! Is it not clear that he is referring to heaven? So “that which is perfect” is heaven, and “that which is in part” is our incomplete knowledge and understanding of God.

### ***Summary and Conclusion***

Our study of the subject of tongues (from a Biblical perspective, not historical or traditional) forces us to acknowledge several points:

- 1. Tongues were an important part of worship in the early church.**
- 2. Tongues were used in three different ways: as a sign of receiving the Holy Ghost, in praise and worship, and in communicating a message from God (the gift of tongues).**
- 3. There is no Biblical reason to believe any of these uses of tongues ceased with the apostolic age.**

It is our sincere prayer that the reader will open his or her heart and mind to what God's Word says regarding the proper and improper uses of tongues within the church today.