

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

*“For anyone who speaks in tongues does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.”
—1 CORINTHIANS 14:2*

Speaking in tongues has been somewhat of a hot potato, particularly in the past century. Is there such a gift today or was it a gift given by the Holy Spirit to the early church for a specific purpose, which is no longer necessary or valid?

We first need to understand its historical setting and its contemporary significance in the church today. On the Day of Pentecost, with a gathering of people from all over the known world, there was a group of 120 men and women who began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:11-12 says, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Something significant was clearly happening, and is quite relevant to another occasion recorded in Genesis. “The people said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth’” (Genesis 11:4). But the Lord came down to see, and He confused their languages, which halted the building of the tower, and He scattered them all over the earth. “This is why it was called Babel – because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world” (Genesis 11:9).

There are distinct contrasts between the building of the tower of Babel and the Day of Pentecost. At Babel, the people tried to climb up to God. It was a human event, which God had cursed with the gift of tongues, dividing and scattering the people. At Pentecost, God came down to the people, a divine event, which blessed and united the people. Pentecost reverses Babel in symbolism and significance. Just as Adam and Eve were separated from the life of God, and became spiritually dead, Pentecost reunited people with God, and they became spiritually alive.

As for the contemporary significance of the gift of tongues, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:4, “He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.” Speaking in tongues is the only spiritual gift that is for self-edification. It is a gift which lifts the soul into a greater consciousness of the presence of God, and into a deeper worship of Him. Controversy exists where some think if you have this gift you should use it, while others think you shouldn’t. What Scripture says is that you may speak in tongues, but in 1 Corinthians 12:31, Paul says, “eagerly desire the greater gifts,” and encourages us in spiritual gifts that build up the church and are for the common good.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, it is a wonderful privilege to be blessed with the gift of tongues, but I pray Your Spirit would fill me with gifts that will benefit others. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: If blessed with the gift of tongues, when and where would I use it?