

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

*SOME QUESTIONS
AND
AN ATTEMPT AT
SOME SENSIBLE ANSWERS*

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this little book came out of a church away day when the subject of tongues came up and there was an opportunity for asking questions. Most of the questions that follow, were raised in that session.

Tongues seems to be one of those ‘under the counter’ subjects which rarely gets aired, but which lots of people seem to have questions about. The treatment here is deliberately low key. It seeks to give some honest answers without being heavy or dogmatic about any particular position. I believe that, when used rightly with grace and faith, tongues can be both helpful and encouraging. However, I would be the first to concede that they are not always so exercised, and they can sound like a clanging gong or a crashing cymbal. Mind you, I have heard preaching and prayers that have been pretty excruciating as well, so I think that it would be good to judge tongues in a similar way to some of the other things that Christians do.

I think it will be helpful to give a bit of background to the usage of the phrase ‘speaking in tongues’ as it is not a phrase we tend to use in everyday English.

The bible was written in common Greek, the language of the people spoken in the streets and shops of that time. Unfortunately, Christians have developed the meaning of many words and phrases, and given them a religious feel that would originally have been lacking. For example the word deacon, which is often used to describe an official role in some churches, would originally have meant little more than a waiter or barman

who was responsible for seeing that everyone was served with food and drink. Eucharist, which has now gained a sense of reverence as bread and wine are dispensed from silver utensils, simply meant thankfulness, or saying a blessing or grace. Speaking in tongues would have meant no more than speaking another language. The Greek word for language was sometimes translated tongue, similar to how we might say 'every tribe and tongue' meaning all types of people speaking different languages. When the bible refers to 'speaking in tongues', it simply means speaking in other languages. The thing that makes it notable, is that the languages have not been learned, and so it includes an element of the supernatural. So as we consider the use of tongues, we will do so in the context that it just means speaking in other languages, but by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

The bible does not go into detail how the Holy Spirit enables people to move in different gifts and ministries. As with tongues, most of the gifts have both a natural and a Spirit enabled function. Healing, giving, preaching, leading or encouraging can all have an application out of natural ability, but they also have the potential to go beyond that and be directly energised and enabled by the Holy Spirit.

When we study a subject in the bible, we need to realise that we will only ever have partial understanding. A fuller understanding usually develops by the combination of three things. Firstly, we need the Holy Spirit to help us understand what has been written. Secondly, by faith we should seek to put into practice what we have learned and thirdly, the experience that follows should be evaluated in the light of the bible passages that were our original starting point.

For instance, even though Jesus himself said that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive', we can never actually know that

is the case until we start giving in faith, and by faith receiving that blessedness. Even though the bible is true, it has to be put into practice and to be experienced in life in order to be fully known and understood.

All aspects of the Christian life require some measure of understanding, action and experience in order to be truly authentic.

Most Christians do combine these elements to some extent in what they say and do. However, even those of us who would have a strong reliance on the bible, may tend to allow ourselves a surprisingly large amount of bias toward the action and experience elements. When it comes to such things as youth and children's work in the church, very few would have a clear biblical mandate for the things we introduce into it and the methods we use to do it. Such things as cutting, colouring and pasting, or youth clubs and adventure camps, are primarily based on our own or others previous experience, rather than clear biblical instructions to do them.

The bible indicates that preaching is a (if not the) chosen method of communicating God's message to the world and the church. However, it gives very little clear guidance as to method. Whilst receiving the mandate to preach from the bible, most preachers would also speak of the elements of God's call, of launching out in nervous faith, of learning methods from other people and of then gaining experience for themselves. Not least, they would also take account of the effect and fruit of their preaching in order to help assess its validity. Whilst it is clear from the bible that study and prayer are key things that undergird the preacher, quite how they do that is not so clear. Neither is it explained how the mind and the spirit combine to become more effective, nor how preaching helps people to be converted and then to grow.

When we come to look at the subject of tongues therefore, we should not demand a higher and more detailed biblical base and explanation for it than we would require of other things.

The point of this rather extended introduction is to suggest that we approach the subject bearing in mind that the criteria that we apply to a study of tongues, should be essentially the same as the criteria that we bring to a study of any other gift or grace of God. That is, we allow as much of a contribution from experience and action to the biblical material* as we would for preaching, children's work, music, hospitality or any other aspect of church life.

**There is a list of bible references related to speaking in tongues included on page 30*

QUESTION 1

Were tongues something that just lasted for the period of the apostles or did God intend them to be exercised during the whole church period up to and including the present?

There are churches throughout the world which welcome and accept the practice of speaking in tongues in moderation. Virtually all the major denominations would have some churches where the gift is exercised, and in the UK most Pentecostal and new church streams would consider tongues to be a normal part of Christian experience.

There are those who would acknowledge that tongues may still be around, but would consider that they have little to do with mainstream Christianity, and are best left alone or else practiced very discreetly and not mentioned in public.

A third position, sometimes termed cessationism, is that not only tongues, but also other supernatural gifts such as prophecy and healing, finished once the New Testament was completed. Worldwide this is probably a minority position but some of those who hold it are very firm in their conviction and advocate that these things have no place in the post apostolic church, including the church today.

QUESTION 2

Do you need the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues?

If we were to ask ‘Do we need to breathe in order to blow our nose?’ the answer is obviously yes, but that should not lead us to infer that having the ability to blow our nose is the reason why we breathe. We breathe in order to live physically and we need the Holy Spirit in order to live spiritually. When we are alive physically we have the potential to function in all areas relating to life (including blowing our noses); when we are spiritually alive we also have the potential to function in all areas relating to life (including speaking in tongues). In the natural, some functions are never realised, and this may be the case in the spiritual as well. However, most functions are encouraged and Paul exhorts his readers to receive and exercise the various gifts.

Unfortunately, there is considerable disagreement among Christians as to how and when we receive the Holy Spirit so it may be helpful to consider briefly the different views.

The Orthodox Church believe that water baptism and anointing with oil which they administer, always impart the Holy Spirit. Many evangelical Christians would teach that Christ gives the Holy Spirit at the point when someone acknowledges that He is their Saviour, whereas others would argue that it happens at the point when a person becomes a committed follower of Jesus and demonstrates that in water baptism. Christians influenced by the holiness movement (such as the early Methodists and Salvation Army) have often taught that whilst we receive the Spirit in measure at conversion, a subsequent experience is necessary and this relates specifically to being sanctified. The Pentecostal churches have also taught the need for a second experience, but

for power and gifts. Others say we need three experiences of receiving the Spirit: for conversion, for holiness and for power and gifts. Some who teach second and third experiences, teach that the one related to power and gifts is always accompanied by an initial manifestation of tongues.

When I was young, I used to swim regularly in the sea. At the end of the season when it was cold, some would take several small steps to inch their way in while others would run, and jump in with a splash. At the end of the day, we cared little how folk had entered the water; the division was between those who had swum and those who had stayed on the shore.

I have been involved with different churches who have taught right across the spectrum in this matter. What is wonderfully astonishing, is that God seems to have accommodated Himself to any variation that stops short of gross error. It seems that God exercises pragmatic grace a great deal of the time. It is therefore more important to determine whether I am walking in the Spirit today, rather than trying to work out the mechanics of how and when I started. If of course we do not have any relationship with the Holy Spirit, then we need to re-examine our position in Christ.

We have planted a number of courgette seeds this year that are germinating very unevenly. Some have needed much more warmth and water than others. When we harvest them, we will be uninterested in the varying of stages they did or did not go through; our interest will be on the lack or abundance of fruit that has ultimately grown.

QUESTION 3

Do we have to speak in tongues?

If we mean ‘Do I have to speak in tongues in order to be a Christian?’ the answer is no.*

Paul expressed the wish that all of those in the church at Corinth would speak in tongues, and also that they would prophesy, but he wanted them to do so humbly and with due regard for others. On other occasions, Paul expressed the wish to other churches that they would all be holy, healthy or generous. He also encouraged the desire to prophesy and to be ready to confess faith or to reason with unbelievers. When it comes to the matter of manifesting gifts and aspects of growth, Paul seemed give a wide range of encouragements rather than issuing commands, but I would judge that even something expressed as an apostolic wish deserves to carry some weight of authority.

A very few Christian groups teach that tongues are **the evidence of being a Christian, but that is not the normally accepted position.*

QUESTION 4

Does speaking in tongues make you a better Christian?

This is a fair question but not easy to answer.

If we were to ask whether the acts of giving, praying, fellowshiping, singing spiritual songs, reading the bible or speaking to others make us better Christians, whilst the answer would probably be yes, I suspect that most of us would struggle to quantify the particular contribution that any specific action makes on its own.

Many foods today have some sort of statement on the packaging that they will do you good ‘as part of a controlled diet’. In other words, do not expect them to do much on their own. I would want to make a similar statement about the things that we do as Christians. They should all hopefully contribute to making us better Christians (within ourselves, towards God and for the benefit of others), but it is in the overall balance of our spiritual diet and exercises that benefit will be seen most. All, including tongues, can play a part. But none, including tongues, should be relied on to the exclusion of others.

QUESTION 5

Do you receive this gift without doing anything?

It is extremely rare that we receive anything without doing something. There have been cases both in the bible (Cornelius and his household for example) and also in history, that people have received the gift of tongues without expecting it or even being aware of its existence beforehand. However, and this is important, it has always been in the context of them seeking or having an encounter with God.

All of our Christian life and its outworking is rooted in faith. The thing that we are continually encouraged to 'do', is to believe what God has said and to act on the basis of that belief.

The important thing with tongues is not to put them in a class of their own but to treat them as we would all of God's gifts and graces. We receive forgiveness, generosity and love by believing and then acting on that belief. So too with tongues.

In my experience, when someone has said, 'If God wants to give tongues to me He can but I'm not going to ask for it', they have not usually received anything. Mind you, I have not been aware of people receiving salvation or any of the other of God's gifts on that basis either.

QUESTION 6

How do you begin to speak in tongues?

When most of us do anything for the first time, it is usually faltering, nervous and imperfect. There are some who burst on the scene full blown and confident, but they are generally in a minority.

When I first preached, I had to open my mouth and say something. When I first spoke to someone else about Jesus, it was the same. The thing we are considering is *speaking* in tongues, therefore it is pretty certain that it will not happen unless you do actually speak out.

For myself I am not over keen on applying techniques such as encouraging someone to 'say banana backwards'. Though by the grace of God there have undoubtedly been some folk who have started this way. I would tend to encourage the pathway of exercising faith, thanking God, and then expecting God to prompt an occasion to move out which may be on your own or at a time when others are praying as well.

QUESTION 7

How do you know that it is real and that you are not making it up?

This is the sort of question that my wife asks me about many of the things which I say in English. It is never a bad thing to be asked to check out the validity of what we do, though validating a subjective experience is not always easy.

The criteria that we apply to tongues though, is not substantially different from what we apply to anything else. Does it help, does it encourage, does it build up, does it tend toward wholesomeness, does it lift us up, and does it nurture our relationship with God? Now these things may not happen immediately but they should be evident to some extent in the long term.

Initially many of us experience doubts about whether what we say in tongues is real (though I suspect that many more of us have similar doubts about what we pray in our own native language as well).

When I began to speak in tongues, I seemed to only have a very few words or phrases and a very limited vocabulary. For around a couple of years I struggled with doubts about it. Then I got fed up and prayed one night, 'Blow it, it's either real or it's not. If it is not I don't want it, but if it is, I am going to go for it.' I began to move out more confidently and over the years, I have spoken in what seems to be several different languages with increasing fluency.

QUESTION 8

Do you know what you are saying?

Usually not. Paul says that when we pray in tongues the spirit prays but the mind is unfruitful.

However, on occasions when we do not know how to pray about a situation and we pray in tongues, it sometimes seems to happen that some understanding comes about the situation, so that we are better able to pray about it in our own language.

QUESTION 9

Is tongues a lesser gift?

Probably yes, in a similar way that in some respects, potatoes are a lesser food to asparagus or strawberries. I do not intend to give up potatoes just because they are not as special as asparagus, and I do not see that tongues should be cast aside because they have less value than preaching.

QUESTION 10

Can you converse in tongues with someone else or is it personal?

Speaking in tongues on your own in private is just that. It is communication between you and God.

The first occasion of speaking in tongues (the 120 on the day of Pentecost), did however have an element of communication insofar as those that heard them, understood what was said. This particular aspect of the gift is not repeated in the biblical record, though Paul does refer to tongues being used in public with an interpretation by another person.

There have been occasions through history when people have claimed that God enabled them to communicate evangelistically through tongues and one or two cases seem well documented. There are stories of those who have heard someone speaking in tongues and have recognised it as their own language. There are also those who claim to have been given an understanding of a tongue by God, which has resulted in their conversion (I was present in a meeting on one occasion when this happened.)

These instances are more in line with what took place at Pentecost, and are not incidents of Christians having a conversation in tongues with one another.

QUESTION 11

Is what is said always in the Spirit or can there be times when what is said is wrong?

Most of us have probably sung a song in church where the words have made us cringe or else have been subject to a long and boring prayer or sermon.

Any participation in church which come via people, is subject to control by those people. A great Christian song or hymn may clearly show the influence of God's Spirit upon it, and God may speak to us clearly through a sermon or a word of testimony. However, it is possible that even if God has prompted the writer or speaker, and even if there is a genuine measure of the Spirit's involvement, an imperfect human element may ultimately outweigh the divine. This can also be the case with the manifestation of spiritual gifts. There are many reasons for this. In a new Christian, it may be that nerves have taken over. In a more experienced Christian, it may be that complacency has crept in, or else, in a worst-case scenario, pride has surfaced and marred what God wanted to say.

Tongues are no different. It is possible for our prayers to move from spirit to flesh and back again, whether they are in our native language or in a tongue.

If most of our daily walk is spent in humility before God, with thanksgiving and a heart set on obedience, then what we do in church will bear the mark of that. However, if we are walking in disobedience that is likely to show through as well.

QUESTION 12

I have been in a meeting where people were speaking in tongues very loudly, even shouting, and it seemed completely chaotic. Surely, that is not right?

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, it seems he was aware that they had allowed some excessive emotional outbursts in their meetings. Unfortunately, similar things do happen today.

Some churches, appear to work on the principle that God is deaf and that His chief delight is a noisy, uncontrolled meeting. There is nothing in the bible to support this attitude. Rather Paul encourages his readers to do everything decently and in order. That would include tongues. Shouting in tongues is more likely to be a result of immature leadership and excessive emotion rather than a helpful, genuine expression of the gift of tongues.

QUESTION 13

I have heard that tongues can be demonic. Does that ever happen and how do we know if it does?

Occasionally, there may be a manifestation of a tongue, which is demonic, but it is rare and is usually easy to spot because it will bring a heaviness and confusion to the meeting. I have known this twice in forty years of ministry and in each situation, virtually everyone present was able to discern that something was wrong.

It is not usually possible to identify a counterfeit tongue simply by the quality of it. I have heard demonic tongues that were exceptionally fluent. However, the Holy Spirit will always give discernment. I was present on one occasion when it happened, and the leader of the meeting said that he did not think the tongue should be accepted. The interesting thing is that by far the majority of those present knew for themselves that the tongue was not of God as well.

Far from being a bad experience, many people were encouraged by the fact that they were enabled to discern that the tongue was demonic. This gave them the assurance that the Holy Spirit was working in them to assess the situation.

QUESTION 14

What actually is the point of tongues?

If you are wanting to know why God chose to include tongues as a manifestation of the Spirit I'm afraid I can't answer, just as I do not know why God has chosen the foolishness (by His own definition) of preaching as one of the principle ways in which He makes himself known to people.

If you are asking what the bible indicates to be the purpose of tongues used in private, its clearest statement is that it builds up the person who speaks. This is where it is different from all other gifts of the Spirit, for they are intended to benefit people other than the one exercising them.

Long-term physical exercise generally benefits our bodies. In a similar way, when tongues are used alongside other spiritual exercises such as bible reading, study, or prayer they will generally benefit our spiritual wellbeing.

In the short term, some people have found that tongues can be useful in stirring the spirit when we have neglected other disciplines. Speaking in tongues can be a helpful way of getting things moving again spiritually, and as such, demonstrates the extreme graciousness and kindness of God in giving us a gentle way of kick starting ourselves into action again.

Paul said that he spoke in tongues a lot; more than all the Corinthians, and as they seemed to be majoring on the gift, it must have been something he used a great deal.

He also expressed the desire that his readers would all speak in tongues, even though some of them appeared to be misusing it. This seems to indicate that he considered the advantages of the gift outweighed the apparent problems that might have arisen.

It is obviously speculation to say how Paul used tongues, but one of the suggestions that has found some favour has been that he especially prayed in tongues while carrying out his job of tent making. Many Christians today who use the gift have confirmed that it has been a helpful practice to be able to concentrate on their work, especially if it involves a lot of manual activity, and yet to be able to pray at the same time without the distraction of thinking through what they are saying. Similarly, many people have indicated that they find it helpful to pray in tongues while they are driving or fulfilling household jobs, as it enables them to pray but also to concentrate on the road or on the task in hand.

QUESTION 15

What is the difference between speaking in tongues and singing in tongues?

Again, we should consider the question from the standpoint of activities other than tongues. If we asked, what is the difference between speaking and singing in our own language, we should consider whether we mean specifically from a spiritual point of view or from what arises out of our shared humanity.

As human beings, we have discovered that communicating in song can often enhance the level of communication because it engages a wider range of human faculties than speech alone. Our emotions are engaged, our memories stimulated, our capacity to empathise sharpened and our ability to worship released. The bible reflects this as it records and encourages songs of love, lament, praise, and thanksgiving. When we add a spiritual dimension as well, there can be moments of exceptional beauty, which merges into worship and adoration.

There is a couple of differences when it comes to corporate singing in tongues. Negatively, we lack the element of understanding what is sung. Positively, we are released to harmonise and sing different parts without having to concentrate on fitting the words in with others. It can embrace beauty, wonder, worship and emotion, not bound by a need to express them in known words.

There has been debate about corporate singing in tongues as it is not something expressly mentioned in the bible. However, as we said in the introduction, neither are youth work or children's activities and many of the other things we do.

My own approach to the matter is to apply biblical principles in the absence of specific biblical direction. Does it build up, encourage, edify, increase faith and stimulate the will toward obedience. If it does, then surely it should be allowed. Of course, if it is raucous, unruly and causes pride then who wants it?

There can be a grey area when we hover on the borderlands of flesh and spirit. When a flock of seagulls is taking to the air, it can be noisy, uncouth and unpleasant. However, once they are airborne and hit the air currents there is a transformation as they spread their wings and soar effortlessly across sea and sky. So too sometimes, when Christians are reaching for the wind of the Spirit, there can be moments of fumbling and flapping that precede the flowing in beauty and harmony. These are occasions when we need to exercise grace and discernment.

Sometimes if the seagulls do not hit the air currents they do need to come back down again and give it a rest, and so do we. However, when there is a genuine breakthrough it can be a wonderful experience.

I had a friend who had been on the fringe of Christianity who was converted through an exceptionally beautiful manifestation of corporate singing in tongues. He said that it was so undeniably of God that he was convinced of His reality and finally responded to Him.

QUESTION 16

Is there a difference between speaking in tongues as a private prayer language and giving a message in tongues in a public meeting?

The answer would seem to be yes.

When Paul addresses the issue of tongues spoken publicly in a Christian meeting, he advises that it needs to be interpreted. He also says that there should be a limit on the number of times a message with an interpretation should take place in one meeting.

Because of these limitations it would seem that only a few people will exercise the gift in public, whereas all are encouraged to do so in private.

In some churches where the majority of the people are comfortable with the use of tongues, there may be a greater public use than Paul seems to suggest is normal. This may include a number of people praying together in tongues in a prayer meeting. If it is all done in an orderly manner and the people are encouraged and built up, I would suggest there may be ground for some leeway.

If someone does bring a message in tongues in public, there should be an interpretation given as well, and this will usually be through another person. Where no one else interprets, the original speaker should ask God to enable them to do it.

The interpretation is not usually a word for word translation, but rather what we would call the gist of it.

Some have queried this, suggesting that an interpretation should be a translation representing a word for word equivalent, equal in content and length. It is interesting however, that in Daniel chapter 5 v 25 (NIV), when it records that the words: “MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN” were written supernaturally on a wall, the interpretation that Daniel gave could not have been a translation. He said they meant “God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end, you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting, your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.” Similarly, in the bible the interpretation of dreams and prophecies often seem to be just that – an interpretation rather than an exact equivalent.

On a natural level, there are also languages that use several words when others use one. Bislama, spoken in some of the pacific islands, uses over ten words to translate ‘piano’.

QUESTION 17

At what age can you begin to speak in tongues?

The bible does not address this question specifically, just as it does not specifically deal with the age at which someone can become a Christian, practice regular giving, share faith with others or enter into any other aspect of the Christian life.

If we want some guidelines, we can see that there are instances of ‘households’ becoming Christians and these almost certainly would have sometimes included children. Generally, in the Jewish and Hebrew world of the early church it would not have been as common to divide people into categories based on age in the way that we do.

A Jewish child became ‘a child of the law’ at the age of 12 (as still happens today). People were put to work early on in life and sometimes given responsible positions at quite a young age. Alexander the Great was sixteen when he led the Greek army into battle. In the ancient world, as has happened throughout history and as still does today sometimes, training for tasks and professions, began as soon as possible. They would not have had a worldview that relegated some things to adults and some to children. Things would have been worked out much more on the basis of circumstances and the ability to function.

In the past fifty years or so, I have known of instances of pre-teen children speaking in tongues. In some periods of revival, there have also been cases of young children prophesying, having visions and carrying out effective evangelism as well.

QUESTION 18

Are tongues known languages, angelic languages, or can they be languages specially given by God to a person?

In the first recorded instance of speaking in tongues, the bible puts it in two ways: They (the 120) spoke in other languages; they (the visiting foreign-based Jews) heard them speaking, each in their own language. The plain record of the event was that between them, the 120 spoke in a wide variety of languages other than their own and these were known human languages. On all subsequent occasions they are just referred to as ‘other languages’.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he says on one occasion: ‘If I speak with the languages of men and of angels’. Indicating at least the possibility of the inclusion of angelic languages in the range.

There are thousands of known languages in the world* so it does not seem necessary for God to invent even more. It is possible, but as the origin of a multiplicity of languages at the tower of Babel was an act of judgement, it seems to make more sense to understand that an act of grace would include an aspect of unification rather than further division.

Some people have commented that when people speak in tongues in a church, it sometimes sounds like ‘gobbledygook’. I agree. I would make two observations:

Firstly, some known human languages also sound like gobbledygook. For instance, some African languages to the Western ear or a North East English accent to those from Asia.

I also think it is possible to begin to speak in tongues and never develop them. If a few words are endlessly repeated and the volume and intensity increased, it is possible that what is said does then sound like gobbledygook.

**(The small island country of Vanuatu alone has an estimated 125 languages used by a population of around 200,000 – some of which are spoken by possibly as few as 3-400 people.)*

QUESTION 19

How do I develop the gift of tongues?

The simplest way that we develop anything is to use it.

If we have the gift and believe it is from God, then we should utilise it. There is nothing wrong in experimenting. Billy Graham used to go into the backwoods where he lived and preach to the wildlife. Is that biblical? No. Was it practical? Yes. He became one of the greatest evangelistic preachers who ever lived. I sometimes pray in the bath, in the loo, whilst I am in bed and wherever I happen to be. I practise preaching walking around my bedroom or in my study. I certainly do not have a problem therefore with practising speaking in tongues laying on my bed on a sunny afternoon. On one occasion, I deliberately sought to move out in new languages and I spoke in several that I had not used previously.

QUESTION 20

Should we refer to speaking in tongues as a gift or a manifestation of the Spirit?

When Paul writes to the Corinthians and addresses the subject, he begins the passage with the term ‘pneumatikon’ which basically means things relating to the spirit or spiritual matters.

Within this context he then states that there are:

‘differences of charismaton’ – grace gifts

‘differences of diakonon’ – we might say service or ministries

‘differences of energematon’ – energised action or working

Then he summarises these three expressions by saying “to each one is given the manifestation ‘phanerosis’ of the Spirit for the profit of all”.

Some have suggested that it may be helpful to designate more clearly the public use of speaking in tongues (with interpretation) as a gift, and the personal use as a manifestation, but there does not appear to be any basis for doing so. This is perhaps easier to understand if we consider a comparison with the use of prayer in our own language. There are times when it is helpful to pray openly in public, but also times when what we pray is more appropriate on our own. Any type of prayer, in tongues or in our own language, may be both a gift of grace and a manifestation of the Spirit.

BIBLE REFERENCES RELATED TO SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Mark 16 v17 – Jesus tells the disciples this will be one of the marks of his followers.

Acts 2 v4, 8, 11 – The first occasions of tongues on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 10 v46 – The Gentiles receive the Spirit and speak in tongues.

Acts 19 v6 – The Ephesians believers receive the Spirit and speak in tongues.

1Cor 12 v10, 28, 30; 13 v1, 8; 14 v2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13,14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39 – Paul writes to the Corinthians about the use of tongues both personally and publicly.

Isaiah 28 v11 – Quoted by Paul in 1Cor 14 v21

SUMMARY

As with all things, so with tongues. The value or validity of what we do should come within the overall guidelines of scripture, but in the New Testament, few things are laid down as explicitly as in the Old. The reason for this is that the work of Jesus opened up the era of the Spirit in which we now live. Whilst the bible should still be central, we follow it in dependence upon the Holy Spirit who is our guide and teacher. By faith, our understanding needs to be fused with action and experience, and this will mean a greater degree of wrestling with how to live in a way that develops maturity.

There are some who would say that tongues are no longer a valid manifestation of the Spirit. From a plain reading of scripture, it seems virtually impossible to make a case that any gift, including tongues, was given only for a limited time. Also, if tongues are not for today, then it would mean that there are an awful lot of godly Christian men and women who are operating under a delusion.

It is important therefore, that those who do believe tongues are a valid and helpful manifestation of the Spirit, demonstrate that it is the case, by ensuring that such manifestations happen in a way that reflects the graciousness and order that mark a true work of God. A significant proportion of Christians today would accept that, rightly exercised, there is a positive place for the gift within the church. It is for us to discover this positive place.

If tongues can be of help in the overall scheme of God's work to build up and equip his church to become mature and efficient in the task of building the kingdom, then we would be foolish to reject such help. If tongues are not helpful or worse still, if they are not of God, then who wants them?