

Untwisting Tongues

Introduction

- The issue of tongues has been a point of contention throughout the history of the church.
- This is a hallmark doctrine of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.
 - These teach that either all true believers or believers that are “filled with the spirit” will manifest the ability to speak in an unknown, ecstatic language.
 - This is often viewed as an act of Divine revelation through the speaker and interpreted by another person.

Tongues in Acts

- Pentecost
 - The gathered disciples “were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues [*glossa*], as the Spirit gave them utterance.” – Acts 2:4
 - *Glossa* – Strong’s G1100 – means either the human organ or by extension human language.
 - The Jews that had gathered from around the world said they heard “every man in our own tongue [*dialektos*], wherein we were born” – Acts 2:8
 - *Dialektos* – Strong’s G1258 – way of speaking, language, dialect – see Acts 1:19, 21:40, 22:2, 26:14
 - Observations:
 - Some of which audience understood, and some did not – Acts 2:13
 - This indicates that it was a real language that could be understood by those that knew it but was unintelligible to those who did not.
 - The audience was only Jews – Acts 2:5-11
 - The content of their speech was “the wonderful works of God.” – Acts 2:11
- Cornelius
 - The Gentiles who heard Peter preach the Gospel received the Spirit and the Jews “heard them speak with tongues [*glossa*], and magnify God.” – Acts 10:46
 - Observations:
 - The audience was Jews, who were able to comprehend what was said to know it was not gibberish (did these Gentiles suddenly speak Hebrew?)
 - The content of their message was that they magnified God – Acts 10:46
 - This was used as proof that their salvation – Acts 10:47-48
- Ephesus
 - Paul encounters disciples of John the Baptist who have received not the entire Gospel message – Acts 19:3-4
 - When they do and believe it, they “they spake with tongues [*glossa*], and prophesied.” – Acts 19:6

- Observations:
 - Like with Cornelius, the use of tongues was proof of salvation.
 - It is unclear if these are Gentiles or Jews.

Tongues in I Corinthians

- Outside of Acts, the act of speaking in tongues is only found in the three chapters of this book (which was likely written between the events of Acts 19 and 20)
- It must be noted that the church at Corinth was far from a healthy church and did little to commend it as an example. Even the discussion of tongues is here a reprimand against their misuse of the practice.
- Note – I Corinthians uses *glossa* exclusively.
- Tongues are recognized as a gift of the Spirit in the early church – I Corinthians 12
 - It is seen as just one way the Spirit equipped believers – 12:10-11, 28-31
 - It is described as an ability to speak in many “diversities of tongues” – 12:28
- Tongues are expressly stated as inferior to demonstrating love one to another – I Corinthians 13
 - Tongues are worthless without love – 13:1
 - Note – the “tongues of angels” Paul speaks of is a use of hyperbole, not referring to something literal.
 - Tongues will one day cease – 13:8-10
 - This could be the end of the sign gift and/or its need when we are all in Heaven united under one tongue/identity
- Tongues are easily abused, and are inferior to other gifts – I Corinthians 14
 - Tongues are a selfish, pointless action if none can understand – 14:2-11
 - Instead of speaking in an unknown tongue that cannot be understood, everything that is done in corporate worship should be intelligible - 14:12-19
 - The purpose of Tongues is not to edify the church, but to be a witness to outsiders, to Jews specifically (Isaiah 38:11-12) – 14:20-25
 - Tongues were permissible so long as (1) there was someone to interpret the language for the rest of the congregation and (2) it was limited in its use because of its ineffectiveness at edification.

My Position

- Tongues were a supernatural gift of the Spirit during the transitional period between Pentecost and the establishment of orthodox doctrine and the completion of the canon of Scripture. This gift gave the ability to cognitively choose to communicate in a known human language that was the speaker was normally unable to speak or comprehend. Through this means God’s truth and revelation could be presented. This gift was for spread of the Gospel and for proof of its acceptance in controversial situations.