

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Putting the Gift of Tongues in its Place

BY ALAN STIBBS

SINCE exaggerated attention and importance tend in our day to be given in some circles to speaking with tongues, it is desirable to try to see its character and place in the context of the Bible and of Christian experience as a whole.

* * * *

In Old Testament times the coming of the Spirit of God upon a man was particularly associated with consequent special utterance, both ecstatic and prophetic. So we read that when the Spirit of God came mightily upon Saul he prophesied; and "the people said to one another, What has come over the son of Kish?" (1. Sam. 10 : 10 f.). Or more generally we read of the prophets who were used to produce the Old Testament scriptures that "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet. 1 : 21). In the Old Testament records we are at the same time made aware that this was a field of experience in which watchfulness and careful discrimination were recognized as necessary. There was need to beware of false prophets. Also it was possible for some to be inspired as mediums and to utter unusual things which claimed to be communications from the world beyond this one, but which were in origin not of God. So tests of genuineness and trustworthiness were indicated, and the need for their use emphasized. The questions to be asked to this end were: Has the word spoken been confirmed by corresponding fulfilment? Is it in full harmony and agreement with what we know for certain is the God-given Word of truth? (See Deut. 18 : 21 f; Isa. 8 : 19 f.)

If we turn our attention to our Lord Himself, and particularly to His earthly life as man, we find that before Jesus began His public ministry the Spirit of the Lord came upon Him at His baptism. In the synagogue at Nazareth He read from Isa. 61 : 1 f. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor". And He instructed them: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4 : 16-21). So in His case the outpouring of the Spirit issued in gospel preaching. There was no speaking in tongues. Nor do we ever read that Jesus spoke in tongues, although we know that the Spirit was given to Him in all His fulness. Why then should any think or teach that speaking with tongues is an indispensable sign of the possession of the Spirit, and particularly of the experience of His outpouring, when the incarnate Son of God Himself did not speak with tongues?

Here it is possible that some may wish to quote Mark 16 : 17, where it is recorded that the risen Lord said: "These signs will accompany those who believe . . . they will speak with new tongues". Since these words come in an appendix added at the end of Mark's record, others would seriously question whether they are part of the divinely inspired and authoritative canon of Holy Scripture. Let us, however,

treat them seriously and try to appreciate the place in God's purpose of signs and wonders.

Clearly signs and wonders have some place, but it is subordinate or secondary, and commonly in character introductory and passing. Once they have arrested attention, and have caused people to heed and believe in the word of God they are for the most part withdrawn. So, in the ministry of our Lord, we find that His miracles, which were signs of His person and His power, were chiefly used in the early stages of His ministry; or appear subsequently only on special occasions and for special purposes. They were not a daily commonplace. What our Lord looked for, and what pleased Him more, was the faith that rested simply on His Word, and did not look for sensational signs. For instance, as a test of the character of his faith, and as a potential rebuke of possible unworthy desire, Jesus said to the official who begged Him to come down and heal his son, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe". But the man showed by his action that he was not in that category. For, when Jesus said to him, "Go: your son will live," the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. Nor was he disappointed (see John 4:46-54).

What is more, the New Testament warns Christians explicitly that signs and wonders can be produced "by the activity of Satan", and "with all wicked deception", in order to mislead men, and to cause them to forsake the truth and to "believe what is false" (see 2 Thess. 2:9-11). Similarly, Jesus taught plainly that prophets who claim to speak God-given words in Christ's name must be tested, because not all of them are, or will be, true. Jesus even said that apparently demonstrated ability to prophesy in His name, and to cast out demons, and to do many mighty works, is no conclusive proof of Christian genuineness. For on the day of judgment He will declare to some of them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers" (see Matt. 7:22 f.). It is, therefore, not only unwise but spiritually dangerous to make the experience of speaking with tongues a necessary and decisive sign in every case of belonging to Christ and enjoying the fulness of the Spirit.

The day of Pentecost was a great day in the outworking in human history of God's purposes for the eternal salvation of sinful men. On that day, in fulfilment of God's promises, and as a consequence of Christ's finished and effective work of redemption, the Spirit was given in a new way to indwell and empower all the people of God. It was appropriate therefore, that such a new beginning or crowning consummation should be openly marked by accompanying signs which would provide immediately recognizable evidence bearing witness not only to the fact of the gift but also to its character. To onlookers and listeners, who were Jews or Gentiles instructed from the Old Testament, the fact that the followers of Jesus began to speak of the things of God in a new way should have suggested at once that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon them. This is how Peter at once explained the phenomenon. They were not drunk with wine as some supposed. But God had fulfilled the promise voiced by Joel to pour out His Spirit; and in consequence all alike of their company had begun to prophesy (see Acts 2:1-18).

In addition, not only did this phenomenon provide discernible evidence capable of indicating that the Spirit had been given, but also details of what happened further indicated truths about the character and purpose of the gift. In Old Testament times the Spirit commonly came upon chosen individuals, causing them to function differently from the rest. Here, as the speaking alike by all demonstrated, the Spirit had been poured out equally upon one and all of them. In addition, the fact that their utterance arrested attention, and became a witness stirring listeners to further interest in, and inquiry about, the truths of Christ, signified that it was part of God's purpose in giving the Spirit to qualify His people for, and to involve them in, witness to outsiders. This corresponded exactly with the declaration of Jesus before His ascension: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem" (Acts 1:8). Also, the significant fact that in their Spirit-inspired utterance, which seems primarily to have been directed to God in praise, they were enabled to express themselves in the different languages and dialects of their hearers was a God-given indication that this Gospel of Christ was by such enablement of the Spirit meant to be preached to the whole world, to people of every place and language.

This remarkable phenomenon was, however, only introductory—a meaningful but a passing sign. The three thousand, who were converted on that day were led to saving faith in Christ not by the speaking in tongues but by Peter's sober preaching and exposition of Scripture. He told them, that if they would repent and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, and be baptized in His name, they would receive the great gospel benefits of forgiveness of their sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This they did. But there is no evidence that they spoke with tongues when the Spirit was given to them. The phenomenon, therefore, is no part of the normal typical experience of becoming a Christian. While the phenomenon had its special God-given place, its place was as an introductory and illuminating sign only, and not as an indispensable mark and a necessary accompaniment of every genuine individual reception of the Spirit.

Later, too, in the church in Jerusalem, when the company of believers in Christ prayed to God, we find that what they asked for was not a further experience of speaking with tongues, but boldness to speak the word in outspoken testimony to Christ. This is the prayer that was answered; and this is the kind of prayer God still answers. So we read: "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:29-31).

* * * *

There were, however, some special occasions in the later spread of the Gospel when God was pleased to renew the phenomenon of the day of Pentecost. So in Samaria, at Caesarea in the house of Cornelius, and in Ephesus, when certain people believed in Christ, they not only received the Spirit but also spoke with tongues. At least it would appear that some such outwardly discernible manifestation must have been granted in Samaria, as well as on the other two occasions, since Simon the

magician was able to observe that the Spirit had been given (see Acts 8 : 14-19 ; 10 : 44-46 ; 19 : 1-7). On each of these occasions the accompanying outward sign of speaking with tongues had its obvious confirming and didactic purpose. It made the apostles Peter and John the more completely certain that God intended those who were not Jews to share equally and fully in the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. So, by God's gracious providence, Samaritans and Gentiles each had, so to speak, their own extra " day of Pentecost ", when, with outward confirming signs a new development was initiated and shown to be of God. But, as a sign, the speaking with tongues then produced by the working of God's Spirit was simply initiatory. There is no evidence at all that all Samaritans or all Gentiles who subsequently believed similarly spoke with tongues when the Spirit was given to them.

What happened at Ephesus is similar in principle though somewhat different in detail. Here Paul encountered a company of disciples who had shared only in John's teaching and baptism. They did not yet know the full Gospel of Christ, and so had not believed in Christ and received the Spirit. Consequently Paul led them to faith in Christ and to baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then, in their experience, the phenomenon of speaking with tongues was granted ; and the event is recorded in the Scriptures as a special significant evidence that baptism into Christ is radically different from John's baptism, and is accompanied, as John's baptism was not, by baptism by the Spirit. The speaking with tongues was, therefore, a sign of the difference, but not in itself an indispensable essential of the Christian experience, of receiving the Spirit. It seems possible, too, that at the time such a witness was needed, because there were other groups who were similarly disciples of John the Baptist, and who needed convincing of the truth that the fulness of the blessing of which John spoke, namely baptism by the Spirit, could be enjoyed when, and only when, people believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

These three occasions, because of what happened on them, were all occasions of special significance. They are recorded for that reason. But there is no ground for supposing that they imply that to speak with tongues was the common, regular experience of all those who became Christians and received the Spirit. Luke's record in the Acts of the Apostles gives no indication of this. For instance, in Philippi, when first Lydia, and later the jailor, believed and were baptized they did not, as far as we know, speak with tongues ; nor did the Ethiopian eunuch.

Similarly in Paul's letter to the Galatians, in which he is outspokenly contending for the truth of the Gospel, and reminding his readers how they became Christians, while faith in Christ and the reception of the Spirit are treated as decisive and indispensable, there is no reference at all to speaking with tongues. One may likewise appeal to Paul's letters to the Romans and the Ephesians as bearing outstandingly important witness on this point. For in both there is a basic survey of the essentials of the Gospel. The reception of the Spirit is declared to be an accompanying consequence of saving faith, a first instalment of the full inheritance, and a seal or proof of participation in Christ. But there is no reference at all in either letter to speaking with tongues as a necessary or inevitable accompanying sign.

This does not mean, however, that assurance concerning the believer's possession of the Spirit and his membership in the family of God is not dealt with in these letters. It is, says the apostle, by the Spirit-given guidance which we experience in the ordering of our lives, and by the liberty which we experience through the Spirit in drawing near to God in prayer, and calling Him "Abba, Father", that we may be sure that we have the Spirit in our hearts and that we are children of God (see Rom. 8 : 13-16 ; Eph. 3 : 14-19). But there is no mention at all of speaking with tongues as a normal or necessary sign. What, according to Paul, is decisive evidence that a man is indwelt by God's Spirit and growing in grace is not the experience of spiritual gifts but the production in the life of the moral fruits of Godlike character and conduct (Gal. 5 : 22-26).

Other important documents in the New Testament confirm this judgment. Peter in his first letter treats spiritual rebirth and sanctification by the Spirit as essential. He treats the exercise by each believer of his own particular spiritual gift as desirable and divinely intended (see 1 Pet. 1 : 2, 23 ; 4 : 10 f.). But he makes no explicit mention of speaking with tongues as necessary to be included and still less does he suggest that it is an activity of the Spirit which ought to be experienced by all. Similarly John in his first letter treats the possession of the Spirit by the individual believer as a decisive, indispensable evidence of fellowship with God (see 1 John 3 : 24 ; 4 : 13) ; but he nowhere implies that the Spirit's presence may be questioned unless it has been openly manifested by speaking in a tongue.

* * * *

An obvious question still remains to be answered. How are we to understand what Paul wrote on this subject in 1 Corinthians 12-14 ? Here speaking in various kinds of tongues is clearly not an initial sign that those who have believed in Christ have received the Spirit. It is rather one of the gifts with which the indwelling Spirit subsequently endows those who have become members of Christ's body.

These gifts of the Spirit are gifts in which all Christians are divinely intended to participate. From Paul's letters we learn that, in contrast to the Thessalonians whose tendency was to despise prophesying and to quench the Spirit (see 1 Thess. 5 : 19 f.), the Corinthians had a rich experience of such gifts. Paul thanks God that they are "not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1 : 7). But here (unless we are mistaken in our understanding of what Paul's writing implies) there was an undesirable tendency to give an exaggerated place and value to speaking with tongues, presumably because of the sensational character of the gift. In what he writes to them on the subject Paul is concerned to give them a comprehensive appreciation of all the spiritual gifts, and thus, so to speak, to put speaking with tongues in its place in relation to the rest. It is our intention here to consider the points made by Paul which have a bearing on this issue.

Paul opens his discussion by referring at once to the danger of being misled. He reminds his readers of the way in which they were misled when they worshipped idols. He particularly has inspired utterance in mind, for he talks in illustration of calling Jesus either "cursed" or

“ Lord ” ; and he declares categorically that the latter is of God and the former not so (see 1 Cor. 12 : 1-3). The ability radically to discriminate and the willingness to refuse the evil and to choose the good are absolutely indispensable here : and because it concerns utterance this particularly applies to prophecy and to speaking with tongues.

Next, both the number and the variety of spiritual gifts are indicated, and the point is implied, and later explicitly applied, that no one gift is possessed by all Christians. So it is out of place for all to desire to speak with tongues. Such gifts are, too, given to qualify Christians to minister to one another, and, because speaking with tongues cannot thus help others without interpretation, this gift ought not to be exercised in the congregation without such accompaniment. In other words speaking with tongues is incomplete by itself (see 1 Cor. 12 : 4-11, 28-30 ; 14 : 27 f.).

Also, spiritual gifts are in their exercise not all of the same value. So, in desiring them, it is good to desire the best,—that is, those which are most helpful to others. Judged by this criterion prophecy which brings intelligible and directly helpful ministry to others, is much more to be desired than speaking with tongues. In the list of spiritual gifts which appears in 1 Corinthians 12 : 4-11 and 28-30 tongues and their interpretation are significantly placed last. Certainly if speaking with tongues is coveted and exercised in a wrong spirit, and not in love, it is of no benefit to the person who exercises it, and he is only deceiving himself if he thinks it has any substantial worth. He is merely like a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal making a meaningless and disturbing sound (1 Cor. 13 : 1).

Even when used in a right spirit the gift of speaking in tongues is by itself of limited value. It can at best profit only the person who engages in it. It is, therefore, much more desirable to covet Spirit-inspired utterance, which is immediately intelligible and practically helpful to the hearers. Indeed, on this issue Paul's choice is, so to speak, no less than 2,000 to 1 in favour of prophecy. For he says : “ In church (i.e. in the congregation where others are listening) I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue ” (1 Cor. 14 : 19). Similarly he exhorts his readers : “ Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church ” (1 Cor. 14 : 12).

Also, in its exercise the gift of tongues is limited to a single part of one's make-up. One engages in it with one's spirit but not fully with one's mind. The apostle, speaking from a full experience of both is in no doubt that it is preferable, whether in prayer or song, to exercise both spirit and mind ; that is, to express oneself not in a tongue but in normal intelligible speech. Wrong preference here, so the apostle seems to suggest, is simply a sign of immaturity, an evidence of preference for childish entertainment or adolescent excitement rather than for worthy adult exercise of mature spiritual understanding (1 Cor. 14 : 4, 15, 20).

The experience of the Israelites in Old Testament times shows that God's normal way of speaking to His responsive people was through the prophets. It was only the unbelieving, who did not heed the prophets, and were carried into exile, who had to be awakened, if it were still

possible, and brought to repentance by the experience of hearing the foreign tongues of their captors. So Paul argues from the Old Testament Scriptures, even if it is in a somewhat unusual way, that God's normal way of speaking to His believing people is not by tongues but by intelligible speech (1 Cor. 14 : 21 f.).

Paul complements this by indicating that intelligible utterance, not unintelligible tongues, is also God's chosen way in the Christian congregation of speaking to outsiders and non-Christians who may come in. If all that they hear is an excess of tongues they will think Christians are mad. What will convict them of God's presence is to hear a word from God clearly and intelligibly spoken. So any exercise of tongues ought to be severely limited, and allowed only when accompanying interpretation follows (1 Cor. 14 : 23-33).

* * * *

It is perhaps appropriate at this point to include a brief word about prophecy—a gift whose exercise Paul treats as so desirable. In the early days of the Church before the New Testament canon was completed, and available for reference, this gift presumably brought by its exercise fresh revelation and God-given illumination concerning Christian faith and practice of a kind no longer necessary once the New Testament Scriptures were written. So one must recognize that any subsequent and present-day exercise of the gift of prophecy must be of a more limited character and confined, along the lines of Paul's exhortations to Timothy (see 1 Tim. 4 : 13 f ; 2 Tim. 3 : 14-4 : 2)—to the use of the Scriptures for public preaching, for exhortation and instruction, for reproof, and correction. In the renewed enthusiasm for the exercise of spiritual gifts which is now manifest there is a danger lest some may claim to have from God fresh revelation additional to what is written. In this connection there is in 2 John 9 a significant warning against going on ahead and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ, that is, in other words, a warning against claiming to have some new light from God which goes beyond what is revealed in the Scriptures.

In 1 Corinthians 14 : 39 Paul ends his references to spiritual gifts by saying : " So, my brethren, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues ". If our understanding of the essence of Paul's thought is correct, we may well wonder why he did not say : " Forbid speaking in tongues ", or at least, " Do not encourage, or give too prominent a place to, speaking in tongues ". Why then does he say, " Do not forbid it ? "

One or two important reasons may be suggested in answer. One is that, in general, there is more danger in Christian churches that spiritual gifts should be despised and suppressed and the Spirit quenched, than that desire for their exercise should run to extravagant or unbalanced excess. So Paul is careful not to forbid any manifestation. As a sign of spiritual life and of positive appreciation of the Spirit's presence, misdirected interest may be better than none at all. Similarly, rather than quench the Spirit the Thessalonians are exhorted to take the risk of a mixture and to grow in spiritual discernment. So Paul writes : " Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything ; hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil " (1 Thess. 5 : 19-22).

A second reason for Paul's injunction "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" may be found in the truth that excessive and unbalanced zeal is by blunt prohibition only likely to be stimulated to greater activity, not stopped. Such zeal needs to be patiently and persuasively re-directed to higher and better ends: which is what Paul had set himself to do in all that he had just written.

A further more general truth may also have some bearing on this situation, and on the place of speaking with tongues. Man is so made that he needs periods of rest and relaxation between periods of effort and concentration. Proper recreation is so called because in its place it is refreshing and recreative and brings renewal of strength. This is true of spiritual as well as of physical activity. So in Ephesians 5:15-20, after demanding from Christians intensive concentration, viz. "walk circumspectly" or "look carefully how you walk", Paul may be recognizing the need for, and indicating the appropriate character of proper spiritual relaxation.

One thing the unregenerate man does in this connection is to get drunk. This, Paul says, is not for the Christian. But there is a corresponding fulness or intoxication which he may enjoy in the sphere not of the body but of the spirit. In the exhortation, "Be filled in spirit", it is not fully clear whether the "spirit" referred to is divine or human. Obviously the two overlap. For it is only in or by the Holy Spirit that a man can be "filled in spirit", that is in his own spirit. So Paul's meaning here may be that just as a drunken man is physically full of wine which is a bad thing, so a Christian may become spiritually full of the Holy Spirit and this is a good thing.

Let us pursue the analogy. When a man is, as men say, "merry" because he is drunk, he may well be found going along talking or singing to himself. The apostle may, therefore, be suggesting a comparable but very different spiritual experience in which Christians speak to themselves, singing and making melody (not really to themselves but) to the Lord with all their hearts.

What may be significant for our study is that there is no mention here of speaking with tongues. For, in contrast to an unintelligible tongue, Paul means here that the words sung should be fully intelligible and clearly understood expression of praise and worship. The full use of the mind as well as of the spirit is necessary to make the activity pleasing to God and worthy of men,—as drunkenness is not.

Certain it is that spiritual life needs such outlet and expression from time to time. So spiritual revivals have commonly been accompanied by much singing. And just as there is a radical difference in value between unintelligible tongues and fully intelligible prophecy, so there is a similar radical difference between beat rhythms which may appeal only to the lower or animal part of our nature, and words sung which outspokenly express glorious truths of God's saving grace, sustaining presence, sanctifying power, and certain triumph.

A grave peril of our day which is widespread in many directions is the peril of ceasing fully to use our minds, the peril of ceasing to be in sober and intelligent control of all our behaviour and reactions, the peril of being unworthily carried away by outside influences. For those who cease fully to think about what they are doing, those who cease to pray

and praise and witness with the mind as well as with the spirit or body, can easily be misled. They are inviting evil spirits to take over. This, as Paul reminds his Corinthian readers, is how they were misled by pagan worship—"swept off to those dumb heathen gods, however you happened to be led" (1 Cor. 12 : 2 N.E.B.).

Above all else, therefore, we need to become mature or adult in mind, and to have senses exercised to discern not only between the good and the bad, but also between the good and the better, and between the better and the best. "So . . . do not forbid speaking in tongues." This so far is right. But also "earnestly desire the higher gifts". "Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church." "Do not be children in your thinking; . . . but in thinking be mature." And there is "a still more excellent way". So, above all, "make love your aim". Such apostolic injunctions, fully obeyed, will keep speaking with tongues in its place.

The Theology of Episcopalian Pentecostalism

BY PETER DOYLE

THE "religious boom" of the 1950's seems to have subsided. What effect this large-scale external flowering of American Christianity had upon the hearts, lives, and souls of the millions of persons involved is known, of course, only to God. But there is reason to believe that another kind of religious movement is affecting the churches of this land. There is reason to believe that we are in the midst of a real outpouring of God's Spirit upon our churches. On every hand members of the "established" churches are expressing deep hunger for the things of God—a hunger which the current psychologically and sociologically oriented programmes and gospels of their denominations do not satisfy. Increasing numbers of church-goers are becoming involved—often for the first time in their lives—with the living Christ. The godless religion, the Christless Christianity, that makes up so much of modern American Protestantism is for many people being transformed into a living sphere for a real relationship with a living God.

This new religious awakening is taking various forms. In this article I wish to comment on one of those forms: the progress of pentecostalism within the Protestant Episcopal Church. As a member and clergyman of the Episcopal Church I would like to speak, from my own experience and reading, of this particular aspect of the current "revival". By "pentecostalism" I refer to the theology, and the practice dependent upon the theology, which has entered our denomination from the established Pentecostal churches. Such books as John Sherrill's *They Speak With Other Tongues*, Michael Harper's *As At The Beginning*, plus the many pamphlets of the Blessed Trinity Society and *Trinity Magazine* have done much to make known the