

Speaking in Tongues

The Wilmington Church of Christ considers the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and therefore our single guide in all matters of doctrine, including all manners of worship. We do not practice "speaking in tongues" in our corporate worship services. We do not believe that speaking in tongues is necessary to prove the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). However, we do not withhold membership from those who believe they have been given this gift, if they agree to exercise their gift privately. Following is a brief explanation of this issue from our perspective.

The Greek New Testament word often translated "tongues" literally means "languages." Acts 2 describes "speaking in tongues" as a miraculous gift given to the disciples so they could communicate the Gospel in foreign languages. Jews from many different nations heard the disciples speaking "in their own native language" (Acts 2:8-11). The disciples were not babbling or communicating in an unknown angelic language. They were speaking recognizable, intelligent languages which they had never studied. The miracle had a two-fold purpose: 1) to more quickly spread the Gospel to those of different languages; and 2) to prove the reliability of the apostles' message. (Since the New Testament had not yet been written, there was nothing to corroborate the apostles' bold claims about Jesus Christ).

The "speaking in tongues" practiced today is usually not understandable as any earthly language. It is often called a "prayer language" or an "angelic language," only understandable by God. Some charismatic Christians say that the ability to speak in tongues is a test of one's faith or a test of the true filling of the Holy Spirit. We disagree with them on this point. The Bible says that all Christians will receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), but that not all Christians will speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

In 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul mentions a type of "prayer language" that people in the charismatic movement claim to be speaking today. He says, "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit." Paul then takes three chapters, 1 Corinthians 12-14, to explain how we should view the supernatural gifts, especially the gift of speaking in tongues, and how they should be used in worship. He asks that we not all speak in tongues during corporate worship lest the world think we are out of our minds (1 Corinthians 14:23), and that we do all things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). He says that intelligible words are more beneficial to the church: "... in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Corinthians 14:19), but we are not to forbid speaking in tongues. He emphasizes that the spiritual gift of love is the "greatest gift" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Some will point to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that "...where there are tongues, they will be stilled" as proof that "speaking in tongues" was a temporary spiritual gift to verify the



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Reviewed by RN & NR Jan. 2014

Gospel message before the New Testament was written. This ideology states that since we now have God's Word, we no longer need the miraculous or supernatural gift. (The same is said of the supernatural gifts of prophecy and healing.) But if God wants to allow someone to speak in an angelic tongue or a foreign language, He can do that as well today as He could in the New Testament.