

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE TONGUES

The Holy Spirit

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I have done an extensive series a year ago looking at the data of scripture in respect to the defense of Pentecostal doctrine on the Holy Spirit. My purpose tonight is not to recover that ground. But to kind of think aloud with you about some things. And to try to take a stab in answering that question, Why would God be honored and pleased that in our life we speak to him with other tongues.

I want to advance several responses to that question.

The first response is we may never fully know why God has chosen to be honored in that way in our life. I think it's fair to file a disclaimer right at the start. Some of God's ways are mysterious. I've always had a great respect for persons who preached what the scriptures taught even though they did not have a full understanding of them.

For example I grew up in an era when the whole idea of an educated person defending the idea scientifically that God could have created the world didn't happen. It seemed like all the educated people said may evolved. And all the uneducated people that were simply educated in the word of God said it couldn't have happened that way. Many preachers that I know of without any training in biology, no training in the sciences at all simply stuck it out. God had created. Man didn't happen by chance or accident somewhere along the line. As they have been faithful in proclaiming that word now a generation is arising which is able scientifically and intellectually to challenge people in the sciences on their own grounds and their own terms. I think one of the tremendous things that's going to happen if the Lord tarries is that by the year 2000 there is going to be an avalanche of Christian young men and women presently now in training who will be distinguished scientists and who will be writing in all fields of the sciences and will have a hold different thing to present. It will be a new day. Some people stuck it out in the trenches and proclaimed God's reality even when they didn't fully understand what it was all about or how to defend it scientifically.

I think there are occasions in scripture we look at something. We know it to be true because it's in the word of God. We may not understand all the reasons for it.

I want to take a side trip on this fact that we may never fully know why God chose tongues. If we don't ever know the why he did we at least know the what. God did choose tongues in the apostolic age to be a sign of the presence of the Spirit in our lives. Not the only sign. But *a* sign.

Some say God only chose tongues for the apostolic age and tongues therefore are either the least of the gifts or baby talk.

I think in terms least of the gifts, that is a misnomer because God never gives his people junk. The least of one of God's gifts has got to be better than the best of our gifts. So even if I were willing to admit that tongues is the least of the gifts although I think that when you use that term you have to use it in a public setting. Paul said privately that tongues is greatly edifying to the spirit. In the public setting tongues uninterpreted are the least of the gifts. But even the least of the gifts is something precious from God and we ought not to demean it by calling it junk.

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As for baby talk – I’ve heard some use that expression of tongues – I think that comment is a flippant insult to God, to the apostles, to the early Christian church and to the body of Christ today.

Granted, some persons perhaps in the flesh try to imitate this gift of tongues and it winds up in that fashion being characterized as baby talk. But a true gift of tongues is not that at all.

One other thing I should point out about the experience of the Spirit and speaking in tongues is there is very clear evidence in scripture that God meant for this to continue. I’ll link four scriptures together from the first two chapters of Acts.

Acts 1:4-5. On one occasion while Jesus was eating with the disciples he gave them this command. “Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised which you heard me speak about. For John baptized with water but in a few days you’ll be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Note the word “promise”. The promise is the promised baptism with the Spirit.

Acts 2:4 “All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” This is the realization of the promise. This is the gift that the Lord spoke about in Acts 1:4-5.

Peter explains this to be the case in Acts 2:33 “Jesus exalted to the right hand of God he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.” That’s a very important statement it says that when the promise comes you can detect it visually and you can detect it auditorially. You can see it and you can hear it. He points to this example of the disciples on the day of Pentecost all being filled with the Spirit and all speaking to God in other tongues. He says this promise you can see and hear. The promise has those qualities to it.

Acts 2:39 Then Peter says to the whole crowd after he’s told them to repent and believe. He tells them also the Father will give them the gift of the Spirit. “For the promise [the promise is that which Jesus spoke about in Acts 1, it’s that which the disciple experienced in Acts 2, it is that which Peter defines as having visual and auditory qualities, Acts 2:39] the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off.” That’s us. We’re about as far off as you can get – 20 centuries down the road. “To all those who are far off for whom the Lord our God will call.”

I am a rational person. Before I commit myself to a spiritual experience I have to have a rational base for it. I share this because some of you are hesitant to enter into an experience with the spirit where you’re not completely convinced in your mind that it’s doctrinally safe or biblically sound. What I want to do is put some floor under your feet. Give you a trust and confidence that this is the Lord’s teaching. And this is something he very much desires for us. We may never know why he choose tongues as a sign of his presence in the baptism in the Spirit but the facts are there to consider.

Let me talk about some areas of the tongue that don’t necessarily relate to the baptism in the Spirit but which point out the importance of the tongue. Sometimes in reference to other tongues persons coming from a non Pentecostal or non charismatic mold may unthinkingly demean tongues and treat it as something not very important, some minor kind of event. From a human context, forgetting the gift of tongues for a moment, the tongue as an instrument in the body is

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far more important than a fourth toe on the foot. Let me share with you some of the reasons, some of the purposes God had in giving us a tongue.

One, he gave us the tongue in order that we might communicate readily. That we might have the ability to communicate readily. If you don't have it you must resort to writing and writing is much slower. In writing you do not give voice intonation. You do not give subtlety. You do not give instant feed back and expression. Writing is a powerful instrument but Winston Churchill would have never inspired the troops in World War II if he had just written. He had to speak. There's something powerful about spoken communication. God gave us a tongue in order that we might communicate. Otherwise we are mutes in a world that God wants us to express.

Another thing he had in mind or the tongue is that the tongue is the shortest distance between our inner life and our outer life. If you want to know what I'm really like inside hear me talk. Jesus bore witness to this in Luke 6:43-45. "No good tree bears bad fruit. Nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart. The evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." Notice that – out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks. One of the reasons why other tongues is such an immensely edifying experience on a personal level and why Paul says, "He who speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself," is that tongues is an outward expression of an inward reality. Whether it's spoken language that's understood or whether it's unknown language spoken in other tongues. It's an expression of an inward reality. Whether it's spoken language that's understood or whether it's unknown language that's spoken in other tongues. It's an expression of an inward reality.

This is why a most common experience of a charismatic or Pentecostal person is a manifestation of joy. There is great joy in the inner life and it is erupting in the outer life because the outward expression is the immediate, quickest route to the inward nature of the heart. That's why on the day of Pentecost, the persons who received the gift of the Spirit are so badly misread by the audience. They say these people are drunk and yet it's only 9:00 in the morning. Their tongue was an expression of the inward reality and was a quick way of denoting that.

Another thing about the tongue, why God has given us the ability to communicate with the tongue is that the tongue is the shortest distance between our inner life and the inner life of another. The tongue lets the other person in their inner life in on your inner life. Can you imagine the Lord's dialogue with Peter occurring wordlessly? "Peter do you love me?" and Peter responds, "Lord, thou knowest." "Do you love me?" "Lord, thou knowest." "Do you love me?" "Yea Lord, thou knowest all things." There's a communication of the deep heart of Jesus into the very depths of Peter's spirit. A resonance back and forth.

Psalms 42:7 "Deep calls unto deep." I think here is expression in the psalm meaning that the depths in nature call the swallow to migrate. The depth in the moon call the tides to rise and fall. But the depths in God call forth the depths in me. When I pray to God whether it's in English or whether it's in an unknown tongue I am to call to him from the depths of my heart. The quickest way that I release my inner life to God and myself become conscious of it God can read my heart without me speaking, but I become more conscious of what is happening by releasing it in a spoken kind of way.

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Hanna expresses the drama of relating the inner life to God in the fact that when she is praying for a son she is mistaken by the priest since she is speaking wordlessly, she's mistaken by Eli as being drunk. She says, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer. I have been pouring out my soul to the Lord." Often it is the case that this Old Testament expression relates to an atmosphere where the shortest distance from my inner life to the inner life of God is expressing ourselves in an unknown language. It is a pouring out of our soul unto God.

Another thing that is involved with the tongue, a fifth thing that we might note is the tongue has been effected by the fall of man and therefore stands within the scope of God's redemption. It would be surprising since God has a purpose for man his body fell in the fall and it's going to be embraced in the resurrection. Everything that has been ruined by man, God has a purpose in redemption to reclaim it and reuse it. It would be surprising if God didn't have a purpose for the fallen tongue.

James 3:2 and following deals with the sins of the tongue. The tongue is compared to a bit in a horse's mouth, which although very small can turn the horse in any direction. The tongue is compared to a very small rudder on a ship that though very tiny compared to the size of the ship moves an ocean liner through the depths. The tongue is compared to a little fire setting ablaze a forest. Small in the beginning but ultimately ravaging all things. He describes it as a world of evil among the parts of the body, untamable, a restless evil full of deadly poison.

We're given in scripture a whole list of sins that the tongue is involved in. Anger, for example is one of the most common sins of the tongue. Letting the eruption of our inner Spirit work out into the outer life. "Forsake anger, wrath, and clamor," Paul says in Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8. Profanity is another sin of the tongue. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Lying is another sin of the tongue. A deep symptom is that it's of the heart but it's also of the tongue, Colossians 3:9 "Do not lie to one another." Criticism is a sin of the tongue. Not constructive criticism but destructive criticism which results from a lack of love.

Levity is a sin of the tongue, Ephesians 5:4. Levity is unseemly frivolity and silly talk. It's talking all the time like a moron. It's a balance between a humorous frame of mind on the one hand which is ok and a propensity for foolish jesting which from the scripture is unapproved. Grumbling is another sin of the tongue. Philippians 2:14 "Do all things without grumbling or disputes." And foul talk is another sin of the tongue Ephesians 4:29 and 5:3-12 impurity in speech.

The tongue involves us like the bit in a horse's mouth, like the rudder on a ship and like the beginning spark of a forest fire. It involves us in all sorts of evil.

God therefore in the gospel of Jesus Christ has chosen to renew the tongue so that it speaks the truth in love. So that it speaks simply and honestly, forthrightly and directly. He has chosen also as a special sign and grace of his to trust the tongue to give to him praise. Both praise in a natural known language and praise in an unknown language. It's part of his reversing the curse.

In fact I think in this sense the speaking in other tongues is a deliberate symbol by God in reversing the effect of babble. Where may be excommunicated in a sense from God and from one

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another through speaking diverse languages and in Pentecost is in some dynamic way restored to God in praise and worship.

Another purpose for God making the tongue is that the tongue gives us the ability to declare what reality will be to us. The example of this in scripture is Adam. All the animals are brought before him and he has the power to declare what they will be to him. This is a marvelous thing and so often we skip it in scripture. What motivated Adam to call “dog” *dog*? Why do we have specific words to mean specific things? It’s part of the dynamic within us as beings that we can describe reality – give it a name. It has generally accepted agreement and definition. We can go beyond that Jesus says in Matthew 11 to name a verse that is often abused today “If you say to this mountain, ‘Be thou removed,’ that is an obstacle in your life that is in your way of spiritual growth and development and ongoing for the work of the Lord instead of saying that’s going to get me, that mountain is untransverseable, one can continue to say and declare another reality that mountain can be climbed. That mountain can be tunneled through. That mountain can be removed. As we advance in faith to do that it is amazing how our speech gets ahead of what God is going to do and our faith through spoken word creates a reality.

Our words bring about change. If this is true of language which is known it is also true of other tongues. Other tongues are nothing less than the declaration of the wonders of God. Acts 2 those who speak in other tongues are identified as speaking the wonders of God in various languages. I think about 16 different language groups are noted there. The wonders of God is a word which means the magnificence, the grandness, the greatness, the sublimity, the beauty of God. It’s bringing into a reality spiritually a wonder within God. Speaking in other tongues declares the reality of the Spirit being poured out upon us. God has chosen the tongue our most unruly member to be submitted to him in a unique step of faith. Which not only builds us up but in some way renders praise that is precious to the heart of God.

One other thing I would say about tongues. I think the tongue is the one part of the body most fitted to the praise that God wanted to bring forth from the depths of our soul. It’s the one part of the body most fitted to bring for the praise God wanted to come from the depths of our soul.

God wanted to do a new thing on the day of Pentecost. What new thing could he do? To help man praise him more from the depths of his being. Should he tell us to raise our hands as an expression of that? But that has already been done in the Old Testament. Godly men and women raised their hands in devotion to the Lord. That’s Old Testament, that’s New Testament.

Should he tell us to do something with our feet? Should he tell us to fall upon our knees? Should he tell us to have a smile upon our countenance? All these are a part of ongoing, normal, natural, human expression and a part of worship expression. The tongue was the one instrument of the body which required an operation of faith and would be involved a unique manifestation of the Spirit of God in our bodies and in our personalities that had not been previously plumbed before in the depths of God’s past revelation to his people. It was a whole new thing beginning at Pentecost. It was given that in order in the depths of our being we might give to God back to God a praise and song from our hearts.

We have two ways of communicating to other people. We have verbal communication and non verbal communication.

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How do we reach out non verbally to communicate with God? The only way we have of communicating with God is really only verbally. We can't reach out and put our arms around God. We can't reach out and cry at his feet. He is not physically here for us to embrace or touch. All of our communication with God must be by its very nature verbal and from the heart. But God knows. He built us with the need as human beings to react and to relate on an inner personal level with both verbal and non-verbal means. Non verbal is often sometimes powerful and in its proper place right. As compared to speaking. There's a time to speak and a time not to speak.

It would seem to me that God in giving us other tongues gave us an ability to relate to him, although we're relating verbally, we're relating in ways we don't understand and it really in a sense is a non-verbal experience.

It is a feeling, a reaching out after God. It is a pouring out of emotion from within. It is an embrace of God. It is a release of the depth of the inner being. It is allowing God into the inner recesses of our life and it is opening that up to God and pouring that out before God and loving God in way that is mysterious, powerful, right, that is being prompted by the Spirit of God within us. We know from psychological studies that are being done on the nature of man in modern times that part of our brain is a rational side, analytical thinking. And the other side is the creative side. God has chosen in the gift of tongues to employ both hemispheres of our mind and of our deepest inner reaches of being to reach out in adoration and praise to God. That's why Paul will say as a Christian apostle who knew more about psychology than any living psychologist. He will say, "I will pray to God with my understanding but I will also pray with my spirit." I will reach out to God with how I know in my own tongue to reach out to him and I will praise him. But I will also reach past that into the depths of my soul, into that unconscious part of me. That subconscious part of us and bring out of it praise and glory.

That's why when we exercise this gift in our own personal prayer life we feel so tremendously clean. We feel cleansed, purified, radiant, joyful. It's because God in that moment through that speech has had access in the deep inner reaches of our personality that for one reason or another had not been open to him before. God periodically will give us some manifestation, which lets us know beyond the scripture that when a person speaks in tongues they may be doing something involved in speaking in another human language.

When I'm speaking in tongues I do not know whether the language I am speaking is as Paul says the language of angels or the language of men. I honestly do not know that. I'm convinced it's language – the scriptures call tongues, not baby talk – but identified in terms of language. I am convinced that when we talk about speaking in other tongues, only eternity is going to know how many real human languages were spoken, or how many angelic languages were spoken. But I have learned to have the confidence biblically that this gift is meant for every believer.

It is an edification for believers. It is a powerful instrument for developing our life. It can only be received as we're open to God. It does not come to us when we're in a trance like state or when we've achieved a certain kind of realm of unconsciousness that God zaps us and controls us by robot control operating our jaw. But it arises instead from the depths within us. Our first impulse is to shut it down because it seems so much of our self. But it is our way when it happens when the Spirit begins rising within us prompting sounds and articulations, which seem to us to not have meaning.

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It is the Spirit's way of preparing us for an entry into this experience with the Spirit of God. Which as we begin to articulate and yield what is going on on the inside of us we find that it's like a little plant that's been underneath the ground and pushing up. When it breaks into the clear and begins to have a manifestation and expression it simply grows radiant as a flower in full, complete expression. That's why so often when a person has this experience for the first time they perhaps only a few syllables begin to come forth at first. Then suddenly it begins to grow and flower. It's the same kind of thing of Peter's walking on the water. It is a gift which operates as God the Spirit bequeaths us into our subconscious, deep conscious aspect of ourselves. Then beyond that then it is watered by our faith. It becomes a means of releasing joy and praise and the depths of our soul to God. It is a sacred gift and it is God's way of helping strengthen us. It's not the only dimension of Spirit filled living. It is not the only dimension of the Christian life. It is not necessarily the biggest thing in our Christian life. Obedience is the biggest thing. But is a vital tool that God has to help our lives be dramatically shaped by him.

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