

WHY DID GOD CHOOSE TONGUES?

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Tonight I want to enter the next three Sunday nights sort of with an emphasis on the Holy Spirit and tonight think aloud with you on a subject: why did God choose tongues? I have one extensive series a year ago looking at the data of scripture in respect to a defense of the Pentecostal doctrine on the Holy Spirit. My purpose tonight is not to recover that ground. There are tapes on it if you'd like that ground covered in your own mind but just to kind of think aloud with you about some things. And to answer, to try to take a stab at 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 and say 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 in which the whole idea of an educated person defending the dogma, the idea that God could have created the world didn't happen. It seemed like all the educated people said man 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 an accident somewhere along that line.

As they have been faithful in proclaiming that word now a generation is rising 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 carries is that by the year 2000 there is going to be an avalanche of Christian young men and women presently now in training who by the year 2000 will be distinguished scientists and will be writing in all fields of the sciences and will have a whole different thing to present. It'll be a new day. But 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 perhaps where in scripture we look at something, we know it to be true, because it's revealed in the word of God we may not understand all the reasons for it.

I want to take a side trip for just a moment on this fact that we may never fully know why God chose tongues. If we don't ever know the *why* 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 are therefore either the least of the gifts or baby talk. I think in terms of the 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 were the least of the gifts, although I think when you use that term you have to use it in a public setting. Paul says privately that tongues are greatly edifying to the spirit. But in a public setting tongues uninterpreted are

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indeed 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. 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.

Role play: I know as a personal fact that some of the young people have been encountering teaching that sought to tell them that the gift of tongues ceased in the apostolic age. I'd like to do a little role play on that.

Devil's advocate: from 1 Corinthians 13:8 Paul says "Whether there are tongues they will cease," or they will be stilled. Then he says when the perfect comes the imperfect will disappear. In the early days of the Christian church they didn't have the Bible so it was an imperfect day in God's economy for the early church. Now we have the Bible. The early Christians didn't have that. The perfect has come and therefore tongues have ceased. The apostle himself says tongues will be stilled or they will cease. He said that and obviously from looking at the scripture he's saying that when the perfect comes the imperfect disappears. So the perfect has come. We have the Bible. And we no longer need tongues.

Student defending your faith: Teacher, Paul also says that knowledge will cease and he says also that prophecy will cease. So three things are going to cease – prophecy will cease, tongues will cease, and knowledge will cease. I want to ask you. Has knowledge ceased? Do you think prophecy has ceased? People in the body of Christ still claim to have the gift of knowledge, which many understand to be the tremendous ability to proclaim the will of God. That's part of what the gift of knowledge is. Then it's all in the same category. Knowledge is still going on, isn't it? Why then should we single out tongues and say that tongues is going to cease when knowledge hasn't ceased?

DA: I learned in the Greek [this is a great argument to use on people. Get to the Greek and right away you'll frustrate people out of their skin!] In the Greek, Paul uses two different verbs. He uses one verb for the word "prophecy ceasing and knowledge ceasing." The other word is the verb that means a different thing. Prophecy and knowledge have not yet passed away. But since Paul uses a different word for tongues it must mean that he had a different emphasis here. So they're stilled. They are no longer.

Student: Professor, it's really unfair that you would use the Greek on me. That's taking advantage of your position and retreating into something that I really can't defend because I'm just a student. I think that you should realize there are other people who study the Greek who are as qualified in knowledge as you are who hold a different opinion on the meaning of those verbs. Those two verbs are most likely synonyms and that Paul stylistically in this passage is simply using synonyms because he doesn't want to repeat the same word three times. These two words are interchangeable so there's no deep meaning there.

DA: That just goes to prove you don't know Greek. The verb for prophecy and for knowledge is the passive voice. And the verb for tongues ceasing is in the middle voice. The one in the passive voice means it is going to receive an action. Knowledge and prophecy, one day the perfect will come and they'll be done away with. But tongues are going to cease – that verb

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is in the middle voice. It means they'll cease all by themselves. There's difference between the two.

Student: Professor, you're really getting desperate. Your argument is hard pressed and I'm causing you to retreat on all fronts. You started out by telling me that tongues will be stilled. I pointed out that if they have to be stilled, prophecy and knowledge have to pass away as well. You admitted that knowledge hadn't past away so you started backing up and you retreated into the Greek. And you tried to tell me that these were two different meanings. I was able to show you that they were synonyms. Now you pull this fancy stuff on me about the passive and the middle voice. And you and I both know that that doesn't hold intellectual water. This argument won't fly because Paul is not making a distinction in this passage between prophecy, knowledge, and tongues. But he's making a distinction between on the one hand prophecy, knowledge and tongues. And on the other hand love. And he's saying that there is going to come a day when altogether prophecy, knowledge and tongues will cease. And on the other hand love will never cease. When the perfect is come then knowledge, prophecy and tongues will pass away.

Has the perfect come yet? Is it a perfect world yet? Have we yet seen God face to face? That's the perfect. When the perfect is come here is no longer going to be need of any spiritual gift. Only love will abide. Love will even outlast faith and hope. When we see God face to face we won't need faith any more. When we see God face to face we won't need hope any more. But when we see God face to face love will always be present. The distinction you made really doesn't hold water.

Also, I want to share this with you, professor, in all kindness. Where do you get this idea of the apostolic age closing? Do you think that Paul honestly, when he was writing, was thinking about the close of the apostolic age? He was thinking about the coming of the Lord. He didn't vision history from a long distance point of view and say, in a few years the apostolic age is going to close. He was saying, Maranatha! The Lord is coming. The New Testament doesn't know anything about the close of the apostolic age. I've got great news for you. The apostolic age doesn't close. It's still going on.

The fine tuning points of that argument may not have registered at the same level. But I get a little uptight with some argument and trickiness that tries to make a point where the scriptures can not allow a point.

One other thing I should point out about the experience of the Spirit and speaking in tongues is there is very clear evidence in the 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 when 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 will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Underline or note the word "promised." Promise. The promise is the 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

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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. 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. He says “The promise [the promise that Jesus spoke about in Acts 1, that which the disciples experienced in Acts, that which Peter defines as having visuals and auditory qualities] 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. We’re about twenty centuries down the road ... and in California no less. At the end. The part that’s going to be an island after the great earthquake!] for whom the Lord our God will call.”

I’m a rational person. Before I commit myself to a spiritual experience I have to have a rational base for it. I can never unscrew my head, park it in the church foyer and pick it up when I leave. I have to be a rational person. 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 simply want to do is put some floor under your feet. To give you a trust and a confidence that this is the Lord’s teaching and this is something he very much desires for us. We may never know why he fully choose tongues as a sign of his presence and the baptism in the Spirit. But the facts are here to consider.

Let me talk about some areas of the tongue which don’t necessarily relate to the baptism of the Spirit but which point out the importance of the tongues. 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. As some minor kind of event like the fourth toe on the foot.

I want to tell you that from human context, forgetting the gift of tongues for just a moment, the tongue as an instrument within the body is far more important than the fourth toe on the foot. If you don’t believe that just have the choice between losing your fourth toe and losing your tongue and see which one you’ll choose.

Let me share with you some of the reasons, some of the purposes God had in giving us a tongue.

1. He gave us the tongue in order that we might communicate readily. That we might have the ability to communicate readily. The tongue as a created instrument of God is absolutely essential. If you don’t have it you must resort to writing. Writing is much slower. And in writing you do not get subtly. You do not get instant feedback 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 is something powerful about spoken communication. God gave us the tongue in order that we might communicate. Otherwise we are mute in a world in which God wants us to express.

2. Another thing he had in mind for 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 just stay around long enough and hear me talk. Out of the inner life will come the outer expression.

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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. And 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.”

One of the reasons why other tongues are such an immensely edifying experience on a personal level and why Paul says, “He who speaks in an unknown tongue edifies himself,” is that indeed tongues is an outward expression of an inner 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.

This is why a most common experience of a charismatic or Pentecostal person, the most common experience is the manifestation of joy. Because there is great joy in the inner life and it is erupting in the outer life. Because the outward expression is the immediate, quickest root to the inward nature of the heart. On the day of Pentecost the people who receive the gift of the Spirit are badly misread by the audience: “These people are drunk and yet it’s only nine o’clock in the morning.” Their tongues were an expression of the inward reality and was a quick way of denoting that.

3. Another thing about the tongue, why God has given us the ability to communicate with the tongue is the tongue is the shortest distance between our inner life and the inner life of another. The tongue let’s the other person in their inner life in on our inner life. Can you imagine the Lord’s dialogue with Peter occurring wordlessly? I can’t. He says, “Peer, do you love me?” Peter responds, “Lord, thou knowest... yea Lord, thou knowest all things.” There’s a communication from the deep heart of Jesus into the very depths of Peer’s spirit. A resonance back and forth.

Psalms 42:7 says “Deep calls unto deep.” I think here is an expression in the psalms meaning that the depths in nature call the swallow to migrate, the depths in the ocean call the tide 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 an unknown tongue and I’m to call to him from the depths of my heart. Because the quickest way in release my inner life to God and myself become conscious of God, God can read my heart without me even speaking, but I become more conscious of what is happening by releasing it in a spoken kind of way.

Hanna expresses the drama of relating in the inner life to God in the fact that when she’s praying for a son she is mistaken by the priest since she is speaking wordlessly. She’s mistaken by the priest Eli of being drunk. She says, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have been not drinking wine or beer. I’ve been pouring out my soul to the Lord.” Often it is the case as I think this Old Testament expression relates to an atmosphere of 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 raised in the resurrection. Everything that has been ruined by man, God has a purpose in

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redemption to reclaim it and reuse it. It'd be surprising if God didn't have a purpose for the fallen tongue.

James 3:2 and following deals with 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 a ship moves an ocean liner through the depths. A 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 wrath, anger, 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 the lack of love. Levity is a sin of the tongue, Ephesians 5:4. Levity is unseemly frivolity and silly talking. 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 dispute." And foul talk is another sin of the tongue, Ephesians 4:29 and Ephesians 5:3-12 impurity in speech. The tongue involves us like the bit in a horse's mouth, like the ruder 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. I think in this sense the speaking in other tongues is the deliberate symbol by God of reversing the effect of Babel where man is excommunicated in a sense from God and from one another by speaking diverse languages. And in Pentecost is in some dynamic way restored to God in praise and worship.

6. Another purpose for God making the tongue is that the tongue gives us the ability to declare what reality will be to us.

The first 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. Often we skip it in scripture. What motivated Adam to call "dog", "dog"? Why didn't he call dog cow? Why do we have specific words that 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 for spiritual growth and development and ongoing for the work of the Lord. Instead of saying that's going to get me. That mountain is untraverseable. One can continue to say and declare another

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reality: That mountain can be climbed. That mountain can be tunneled through. That mountain can be removed. As if 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, this is also true of other tongues. For other tongues are nothing less than a 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 in 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 reality spiritually a wonder of 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 is 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. God wanted to do new things on the day of Pentecost. What new things could he do? To help man to 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 of 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 in a unique manifestation of the Spirit of God in our body and in our personality that had not been previously plumbed before, the depths of God's past revelation to his people. It was a whole new thing beginning at Pentecost. And it was given that in order that in the depths of our being we might give to God, back a praise and song from our heart.

We have two ways of communicating to other people. We have verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication isn't always too successful.

How do we reach out non-verbally to communicate with God? Since the only way we have of communicating with God is really verbally, isn't it? We can't reach out and put our arms around God. We cannot reach out and like the woman, 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 a 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 sometimes in its proper place it's 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 really in a sense is a non-verbal experience it is a feeling. It is a reaching out for God it is a pouring out of emotion from within. It is an embrace of God. It is a relief of the depths of the inner being. It is allowing God into the inner recesses of our life. And it is opening that to God and pouring that

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out before God. And loving God in a way that is mysterious, that is powerful, that is 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 time that part of our brain is our rational side. One side of our brain is for rational, dot to dot, line by line, analytical thinking. 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 said, "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 God. And I will praise him. But I will also reach past that into the depths of my soul, into that unconscious part of me, let God reach down deep into 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 all the time whenever it's exercised feel so tremendously clean. We feel cleansed, purified, radiant, joyful it's because God in that moment through that speech has had access into 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 that is involved in speaking in another human language. So when I'm speaking in tongue, 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 is language the scriptures call tongues, not baby talk, but identify in terms of language.

One of the men teaching in Yugoslavia has a doctrinal degree. He was a Catholic priest. He was an agnostic Catholic priest, a brilliant man, doctrinal degree in Hebrew. He walked into a little church. This young brilliant Catholic priest had heard about these crazy Pentecostals. He decided to check them out. He walked into the little church in Yugoslavia. During the course of the service one of the believers, simple peasant believers of that congregation, began praising God while other were praising God in to them an unknown language. It happened to be perfect Hebrew. The priest happened to know it and was astounded that such a miracle could occur. So astounded that the result was he gave his life to Christ. He himself was filled with Spirit. And he himself is now involved in training young men and women in Yugoslavia for the ministry.

I have been in a service where a young girl in my college days gave an utterance in tongues. I was astounded because she was not the kind of person in the congregation who gave utterances in tongue. She wasn't known for having that gift. It was interpreted. One of the young men in the balcony of the chapel of that ministry was a gentleman from Taiwan. He was away from home, at the beginning of about a 7-year stretch of study. It was his first year and he was very lonely and depressed. He was astounded because what this blond girl from Minnesota spoke was Mandarin Chinese, perfect diction. There are two basic dialects in Chinese – Mandarin and Cantonese. And many branches off. She spoke in Mandarin dialect using the familiar. If you've studied German you know that formal and familiar tenses. She spoke in familiar tense, Mandarin dialect Chinese. He understood every word that she said. It was a message of comfort and consolation and assurance of God's presence. It revitalized him. It caused him to sink his roots. It caused him to stay it as a special work of grace.

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I am convinced when we talk about speaking in other tongues that only eternity is going to know how many real human languages were spoken or how many real 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 are in a trance like state. Or when we've achieved a certain realm of unconsciousness that God zaps us and begins by robot motor 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 ourselves. But it is our way when it happens, when the Spirit begins rising within us, prompting sounds and articulations which seem to us that do not have meaning. 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 is like a little plant that has been underneath the ground and it's pushing up. When it breaks into the clear and begins to have a manifestation and an 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 that 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 with Peter walking on the water. It is a gift, which operates as God the Spirit bequeaths it into our subconscious, deep conscious, aspect of ourselves. 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 nearly the biggest thing in our Christian life. Obedience is the biggest thing. But it is a vital tool God has to help our live be dramatically shaped by him.

Lord, you've said that we could ask of you and you would give us the gift of the Spirit because the Father never withholds any good gift from his people. The gift of your Spirit, too, Lord, comes to us as salvation does – with profound simplicity. It involves an opening of our heart and a confession of our lips. Let your Spirit abide and draw upon us in this moment. That from our inner being here may flow out of us such praise as we please you. Praise the Lord!

Could I encourage you in a time of personal prayer and waiting on the Lord?