

FACING

***the
tongues
issue***

NORMAN R. OKE



Facing the Tongues Issue

Facing the Tongues Issue

by
Norman R. Oke



Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City
Kansas City, Missouri

First Printing, 1973

Printed in the
United States of America

Contents

- | | |
|---|----|
| 1. Are We Facing a Real Issue? | 7 |
| 2. Why Do Christians Seek to Speak in Tongues? | 9 |
| 3. Where Is Our Final Court of Appeal? | 17 |
| 4. What Does the New Testament Say About Tongues? | 20 |
| 5. What Is Our Present Challenge? | 34 |

1

Are We Facing a Real Issue?

Yes, the tongues issue is real alright: just as real as freckles and income taxes. It is current, pressing, and expanding.

And the tongues issue deserves an answer: a fair, frank, kind, and biblical answer.

What makes it a real issue is the fact that an increasing number of sincere laymen are being confronted with it. And the confrontation comes, not from wicked worldlings, but from fine, Christian, evangelical friends who fervently urge them to seek this whole new vista of spiritual ecstasy—speaking in tongues.

A number of factors have combined in recent months and years to make the tongues issue exceedingly urgent. The Charismatic Movement has swept through many of the

traditional Protestant denominations and has found unusual success even among Catholics.

The modern Jesus Movement within the hippie culture has become deeply penetrated with tongues, the suggestion being that speaking in tongues is essential to deliverance from the chains which fettered them to their previous drug addiction.

In the *Voice*, the organ of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship, there have even been testimonies of splendid men who are or were members of holiness groups. News items like that most certainly tend to confuse earnest Christians of all persuasions, and our laymen find themselves without an easy answer.

I have no desire to be controversial for the mere sake of controversy. And I refuse to reflect on the spirituality or the sincerity of those who advocate speaking in tongues.

But some pointed questions are being asked:

"Why don't our services have as much *pep* in them as some of the tongues services have?"

"Doesn't the Bible urge people to speak in tongues?"

Such questions have confronted me in recent months. You may have faced them also.

If speaking in tongues is an external evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit, or if it is a vital aid to a deeper devotional life or greater piety, then it must not be rejected without careful scrutiny.

So I invite you, my reader, to join me in an honest examination of the New Testament view of speaking in tongues.

This will be confined to a scriptural treatment. I want to know what the New Testament writers said about this phenomenon. Did they face it too? And what was their advice?

2

Why Do Christians Seek to Speak in Tongues?

That is a valid question. Why do people seek tongues? If those who speak in tongues were asked that question, such an answer as this might be given: "I was a brand-new Christian and eager for all that God had for me. A fine Christian friend urged me to seek tongues."

But I suggest that when all the answers have been evaluated, these people would basically fall into three categories:

1. Those who sought tongues because they had not found a deep and satisfying inward witness to the Spirit-filled life.
 2. Those who had not found a satisfying emotional expression in their own church services.
 3. Those whose prayer lives were bland and ineffective.
- Let us, then, consider these three in turn.

I. LACK OF ASSURANCE OF BEING SPIRIT-FILLED

This reason is quite easy to understand. In every normal Christian heart there is a yearning for a "know-so" experience. This is a fact of our spiritual lives, for it is that inner confidence which we just normally expect in our secular lives as well.

When we put money in the bank, we will not leave the window until we have been given a deposit slip. That little piece of paper won't buy groceries, or pay for a tank of gas, but it is our assurance that a certain amount of money is in the bank on which we can draw checks for either groceries or gas.

Pay your taxes and you happily pocket the receipt which is your assurance that for another year you can live on that farm or in that house without fear of being evicted—at least by the government. Yes, assurance is a large factor in all of our daily lives.

So it is small wonder that in the matter of salvation we instinctively want to have assurance. And we of Wesleyan persuasion have a long heritage of preaching on Christian assurance. This was part of John Wesley's legacy to the world. John Wesley's father said to him, "The inward witness, Son, the inward witness—that is the surest proof of Christianity." He urged him to "preach assurance." And John Wesley both preached it and urged his Methodists to seek till they were fully assured by the witness of the Spirit that they were both converted and sanctified wholly.

The Witness of the Spirit

"The witness of the Spirit"—that phrase is both familiar and yet somewhat strange. So let's take a little excursion into this wondrous area of spiritual reality.

All scholarly writers on this subject divide it into two sectors: the *indirect witness* and the *direct witness*. The

indirect witness consists of the witness of God's Word and the witness of our own spirits. Let's take a look at these.

The witness of God's Word is a splendid segment of this total matter of Christian assurance. Here is what I mean: I read in I John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." God, as my Heavenly Father, is both completely capable and absolutely trustworthy—that I know. If He makes a promise like that, my own instincts tell me He will fulfill it. That is the witness of God's Word.

Then there is the witness of my own spirit. Since I sought the Lord for salvation, what a marvelous and striking change has come in my pattern of conduct! Once I loved profanity; now I am repelled by it. Once I detested church and prayer meetings; now I enjoy them. Just my normal common sense says, You were that kind of man; now you are this kind—what a change! This strong inference from the sheer fact of change in life pattern is the witness of my own spirit.

But then there is the *direct witness* of the Spirit. We read in Rom. 8:16, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." This direct witness is a strong inner persuasion that God has accepted us into the family of God. This is the pinnacle point, the moment resplendent in the experience of that seeker after God.

Isn't God good? Far from being left to grovel in the shades of doubt, we are offered this double bounty: (1) the *indirect witness*, which is our portion the moment we believe; and (2) the *direct witness*, which God gives us according to His sovereign timing.

The indirect witness of the Spirit is tremendously supportive, though it is basically inferential. But when the direct witness crowns it all with the voice from heaven which confirms our acceptance with God, we could not thank angels to bring us even a special delivery letter from some other world with the good news.

But if perchance this new Christian is compelled to live for some period of time without this direct witness of which we read in Rom. 8:16, what is his normal reaction? Because he yearns with such a deep longing for that indisputable witness, he may come back to the altar to reaffirm his faith and to check out his confession of sin. Somewhere in this process the witness of God's Spirit usually comes.

However, if it is still delayed for some reason, the seeker after God should never be invited by some friend to seek tongues to prove he is a child of God.

But the Christian who is seeking to be baptized with the Holy Spirit—who yearns for a sanctified heart—faces quite a different situation relative to the witness of the Spirit.

First, the indirect witness is decidedly a different thing. Surely there are the scripture promises, but there are not very many of them that specifically refer to the seeker after the fullness of the Holy Spirit—and perhaps they are also a little less vivid. So he may find it a bit more difficult to find strong biblical grounds for an assurance.

Then, the aspect of the indirect witness which we referred to as the witness of our own spirits is again quite different. When a sinner is saved, usually there comes a striking and quite evident change of conduct. But when the Christian is sanctified, filled with the Holy Spirit, the change is inner and much less obvious to the onlooker or even to the seeker himself. Oh, yes, the transformation may be equally tremendous to the seeker but it is totally inward and normally removed from sight. And this, too, may provide somewhat of an obstacle for assurance.

Now as to the direct witness to being Spirit-filled we come to the heart of this entire discussion. Most assuredly every seeker can expect it, just as certainly as he received the witness to his regenerated experience. But that direct witness may be delayed, and as a result *the Christian who*

seeks for the Spirit's fullness may have an even stronger desire for assurance now than he did when he was a seeker after pardon.

If at this strategic juncture a well-meaning Christian friend comes along and tells him that God has a sure witness—an external and measureable proof, speaking in tongues—he may be pressed almost beyond measure.

Whereas the seeker after pardon, if the assurance was delayed, may be inclined to return to his wicked ways, the seeker after the infilling of the Spirit is more likely to plunge deeper into seeking. He may do so even if it involves the extreme of speaking in tongues, with the dubious consequences which attend that kind of spiritual demand on God.

Then how can we help our seekers after holiness at this point? First, let us reckon with the fact that there are good members in our churches who may have made their commitment complete and have trusted God for the Spirit's full coming. Yet they are waiting with a deep inner longing for that undeniable assurance—that witness of the Spirit.

They listen to sermons and songs for a wisp of assurance to cling to. They don't want fanatical extremism—but they do want, *they desperately want* to have the witness of the Spirit to His full cleansing and infilling.

We would be wise to stress the witness of the Spirit more in our preaching. And we will also be wise to sing songs and have special songs that stress this aspect of our doctrine. There is no harm done if a Christian at this stage taps his toes to the rhythm and melody of a fine evangelical gospel song, but he also wants sung some solid message of deep assurance from which he can hear a tapping at his inner heart's door.

And every assured, sanctified Christian could well pray for those who are yet somewhat short of that full assurance.

II. LACK OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION IN OUR CHURCH SERVICES

Let's never forget it: we are creatures of *feeling* as well as of *intellect* and *will*. All three factors of normal life must be cultivated in our services. If not, there will be an imbalance which will drive our laity to seek satisfaction somewhere else. We are as unwise to neglect the emotional or feeling aspect of a layman's life as the intellectual part. Every local church desires to have members who are intellectually alert and volitionally staunch. We also had better plan to serve well and normally the emotional lives of our people—or danger lies ahead.

In my nearly 40 years in the ministry I have noted changes in the method of emotional expression. In earlier years response was more audible, more physically expressive. In our more urban culture, where restraint is a practiced virtue, our expressions in church services are more private. That is not to say, however, that they are not equally sincere.

Am I pleading for a return to a certain regularity of vocal "Amen's" in a service, or a certain percentage of members who walk the aisles in victorious shouting? Do I want a return to handkerchief-waving (in a day when Kleenex has replaced handkerchiefs they would not wave easily anyway)? No, of course not! These were outward evidences by which these people of a generation ago felt free to express their feelings about God—and that is all it did. There was never any proof that the "Amener" was more spiritual than the Christian who sat beside him in silence. But it did prove that our church services offered freedom for expressing our feelings.

And that we must still do. There must be such an atmosphere in our services today that our people can "feel God nearby." The expressions may not be like those of 40 or 30 years ago. But the expression of deep emotions must be

welcomed, even cultivated, or else we are heading for deep dangers.

Today people are living in such a different culture that when they "get blessed" in church they may weep, they may lift a hand, or they may wrap themselves in an awesome silence. Let the expression be as it may, but let us never be guilty of suppressing our people in the interests of a "nice" or an "orderly" service.

The very fact I have just noted may well explain why so many from the liturgical denominations and even from Catholic ranks have surged toward this Charismatic Movement. They were too long imprisoned in an atmosphere that was utterly devoid of emotional expression and their very natures revolted—and they have plunged into the emotional excess of Pentecostalism.

My plea is for balanced laymen in the church—keen of mind, strong of convictions, and warm in their emotions. Block the emotions and there will eventuate frustrations and inward tensions. Some have sought for tongues in sheer desperation to find an emotional release.

III. BLAND AND INEFFECTIVE PRAYER LIVES

W. T. Purkiser, editor of the *Herald of Holiness*, wrote an editorial (Oct. 27, 1971) entitled, "Is There a Prayer Language?" (It was later published in booklet form.) Here are the opening words of that article: "A new note has been introduced into the discussion of unknown tongues as it is practiced in 'charismatic' or neo-Pentecostal circles. It is the definition of glossalalia as 'prayer language.'"

Dr. Purkiser points out that the new emphasis in tongues circles has moved from an insistence that speaking in tongues is the evidence of the baptism with the Holy Spirit toward speaking in tongues as a form of prayer either privately or in groups. This is a distinct mark of what is known as neo (new)-Pentecostalism.

And this yearning for more effective prayer is not hard to understand. Every Christian finds prayer to be at times a battle royal. Satan seems to keep his interplanetary anti-prayer missiles zeroed in on every Christian who insists on praying.

Added to this is the hectic pace of modern life which screams for our attention from the ringing of the alarm in the morning till the late evening news. So when some have felt frustrated in their efforts to maintain a satisfying prayer life, they have turned to tongues to somehow revitalize their lagging prayer experiences.

What is our answer to this kind of earnest search?

Victorious prayer must never be discouraged. The issue here is closely drawn and demands an honest answer.

3

Where Is Our Final Court of Appeal?

Every Christian must have some final court of appeal for every issue he confronts, for every goal he sets before himself. And he must have goals; otherwise he stagnates or spins his spiritual wheels.

Is his goal to be an effective soul winner? Then somewhere he must find some measuring stick to give it validity.

Is his goal to be a "prayer warrior"? Then the rightness or wrongness of his methods in attaining that goal must find some scale of measurement. Otherwise fanaticism will attack his efforts like a wounded bear.

That final court of appeal is the Bible; basically for us moderns it is the New Testament.

Whatever else I may desire, I must yearn above all to be a New Testament Christian.

If I can approximate that goal, I will have a sense of deep reassurance; if I bypass that goal, I am in for spiritual nightmares.

Soul winning is a solidly founded New Testament goal.

Effective praying is also a goal well supported by the New Testament.

But regardless of the seeming appeal of some suggestion from any Christian source, if I cannot find sound and widespread support for it in the New Testament I am launching my spiritual boat on dangerous waters.

Right here we take our position regarding speaking in tongues. No matter how highly I esteem the Christian friends who recommend it, I am safe only when I judge the rightness of it squarely before the tribunal of New Testament teaching.

If I can find solid support for such an exercise in the New Testament, I must give it credence regardless of any previous teaching I may have had. *But, on the other hand, if my New Testament cautions or warns me at the point of speaking in tongues, then I must give strong heed no matter what friends may say, be they Pentecostal, or Methodist, or Baptist, or Nazarene, or Catholic.*

So this entire issue of speaking in tongues will be placed before the final and supreme court of the New Testament.

There we must find our answer.

The leadings we discover there must be heeded regardless of previous prejudice, or the testimony of well-meaning friends.

But one more word must be said. In basing my pattern of Christian life upon the New Testament, I must come to the Bible on the "WOE" rather than the "IS" approach. Let me explain.

Any significant spiritual truth I find in the Bible comes with much greater meaning and insistence if it has a cumulative "Weight Of Evidence" rather than if it is based on only an "Isolated Scripture." This is the position taken by all biblical scholars. Any truth of major significance is measured by the frequency in which it appears in the biblical record. That gives it "Weight Of Evidence" or "WOE"

value. Some other truths may be noted in the Bible in merely one verse. This "Isolated Scripture" is not to be ignored; this is the "IS" approach.

Even if a major emphasis, such as speaking in tongues, were based on only one or at least a very few scriptures, it would demand some consideration. But to have full acceptance as a pattern for life and conduct it would have to be found throughout the Bible record in widely varied places and be spoken of by several biblical writers.

Keep in mind, then, that we will compare the "WOE" method with the "IS" method in discussing the tongues emphasis.

4

What Does the New Testament Say About Tongues?

The best way to get the message of the New Testament on this strange and subtle tongues movement is to have the various writers of the New Testament come in turn to the witness stand.

First Witness: John the Baptist

It does not need to be argued that John the Baptist's testimony carries great weight. He is a fabulous figure on the horizon of Christian centuries—rugged, undaunted, and strategic in his providential placement.

You see, John the Baptist was selected by Almighty God to be the official introducer of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was John who said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

But John the Baptist was even more highly honored. He was actually given the privilege by God of officially introducing the persons and the ministries of both the Son and the Holy Spirit. These are the last two dispensations. When they are through, time will end. There will be no more in-

roductions of Deity needed. John was highly honored, with honors never vouchsafed to any other man.

Not only did he introduce Jesus as "the Lamb of God"; he also said of Him, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

So it will be worthwhile to check John the Baptist's statements as to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. What does John the Baptist have to say about tongues as a ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Note it well: *he did not make one reference to such a phenomenon.*

If speaking in tongues was to be a distinct mark of the ministry of Jesus or the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who should have known it better than John the Baptist? Yet his silence was fluent, almost awesome—not a whispered word ever fell from his lips about speaking in tongues.

Mark it: he did say that the Holy Spirit would baptize with fire (purge) but he makes not one suggestion of speaking in tongues.

John, you may step down.

And to us all as Christians, anxious to pattern our lives after the New Testament, we find this a note of distinct caution. *If anyone ever insists that tongues is a dispensational ministry of the Holy Spirit, then he must in honesty explain why John the Baptist, who introduced the Holy Spirit dispensation, did not make any such claim.*

Second Witness: Jesus Christ

Jesus came to be the Saviour of the world: He came also to send the Holy Spirit. During His three and a half years of earthly ministry Jesus spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit frequently. Some 13 such references were made; *but not one reference ever linked the Holy Spirit with any speaking in tongues.*

If speaking in tongues was as significant as some aver, how can it be explained that Jesus was so completely silent about it?

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide believers: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

He spoke of the Holy Spirit as a Teacher. "The Holy Ghost . . . shall teach you all things" (John 14:26).

He said that the Holy Spirit would be a Comforter—a "Helper alongside." He would bring things to our remembrance. Jesus told us everything essential about the Holy Spirit and His ministry ahead of time. *And Jesus did not once say that the Holy Spirit would cause us to speak in tongues.*

If Jesus omitted any such emphasis, I find in that very fact a note of extreme caution—even a warning. For I want to be a follower of Christ.

But Jesus did not only point out the factors in the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit. He also showed the path to deepest spirituality, and had much to say about prayer.

The Sermon on the Mount—read it and it drives you to your knees. There He spoke of prayer and forgiveness and patience. *But He did not once suggest that speaking in tongues would be an aid to such a life of piety and devotion.*

Hear it again: Jesus yearned as no one else ever did for His followers to be vitally spiritual. If this strange exercise of speaking in tongues had been a recommended aid, why did He not make at least some passing reference to it?

And because He didn't, I must put on my spiritual brakes.

Oh, but just one minute, someone says: "How about Mark 16:17-18?" That is a good question.

Here is the passage: "These signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if

they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

Let's be transparently honest about this verse.

First, note that there are gathered together here five distinct powers: casting out devils, speaking in new tongues, handling snakes, drinking poison harmlessly, healing the sick. Simplest logic would tell us that they are a "bouquet of powers" and one should not be emphasized while the other four are omitted. Either these five are to be applied together, or not at all. And I have yet to hear of any advocate of speaking in tongues who recommended drinking DDT to prove the power of God.

Second, this passage is not a strong scripture on which to build such a major emphasis because it is of doubtful origin. Scarcely any version of the Bible includes verses 9-20. This is because they are not found in the earliest and best manuscripts.

So the statement made earlier that Jesus was silent relative to speaking in tongues still holds true.

And those of the "Jesus Movement" who make speaking in tongues a strong emphasis would do well to read again the words of Him whose name they bear. They will find that Jesus gives absolutely no suggestion of any speaking in tongues.

So as Jesus steps down from the witness stand, I note that these two, whose witness alone should be enough, provide me not only with a word of caution—but a note of stern warning as well.

Third Witness: Simon Peter

This witness fairly shakes the place as he moves heavily to the witness stand: rugged, vibrant, and expressive.

Were we to ask him if he was present on the Day of Pentecost, he would answer eagerly in the affirmative. On that memorable day he was filled with the Holy Spirit as

were all of the 120. This we know for sure as the account of Luke reads: "They were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:4, italics mine).

Did Peter also speak with "other tongues"? It is quite probable that he did, but none can claim that beyond doubt from the biblical record. For the verse that states that they were "all filled with the Holy Ghost" also clearly states that they "*began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*"

It is worthy of note that Acts 2:4 does *not* state that all who were Spirit-filled spoke with tongues. It says in plainest language that they spoke with tongues "as the Spirit gave them utterance." It is very evident that, on the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit sovereignly determined which of the assembled disciples spoke in the various dialects. He determined which disciples spoke with tongues, and which ones did not.

Simon Peter, then, may well have spoken with tongues. He most certainly was a central figure in the glorious witnessing of that historic day in which some 17 or 18 different dialects were represented among the hearers. He was well aware of what was happening, and was well able to evaluate the tongues aspect of Pentecost.

About 10 years later Peter was speaking in the house of Cornelius when the Holy Spirit was outpoured. All who received Him, the record states, also spoke in tongues (Acts 10:46). Peter could not forget this sensational aspect of the "Gentile Pentecost." Some five years later at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15), Peter reported on the two events—the Day of Pentecost and the Gentile Pentecost in Cornelius' home. And note it carefully: *he made absolutely no reference to the speaking in tongues in either instance.*

Did Peter just have a poor memory? Was he insensitive to the subtle leadings of the Holy Spirit? The only possible answer is that for some reason Simon Peter did not consider the tongues aspect of either the Pentecost in the Upper

Room or the Gentile Pentecost in the home of Cornelius as important enough to be required of, or to be helpful to, New Testament Christians.

To add weight to this suggestion, add this final bit of testimony from Simon Peter. This colorful fisherman left us a fine heritage of writings as well as his vivid pattern of living. His two Epistles were written to the "strangers scattered abroad." These early Christians were part of the dispersion when relentless persecution hit Jerusalem with devastating fury and they fled to various parts of the Roman Empire. As "strangers" they were desperately in need of every bit of spiritual encouragement that they could be given.

In these Epistles, Peter spoke of the ministry of the Holy Spirit eight times. He spoke of "sanctification of the Spirit," but not one time did he even suggest that speaking in tongues would be of any aid in proving that they were Spirit-filled, or be of any help in strengthening their devotional lives.

As this third witness steps down from the stand, it will be seen that my note of caution has become a strong note of warning.

If Peter felt that Christians of the first century did not need tongues, then we Christians of the twentieth century had better hesitate before we begin frantically seeking what these early Christians considered to be unnecessary.

Fourth Witness: The Apostle John

Less volatile than the last witness is the Beloved Apostle. He is more gentle, but so penetrating is his gaze that his eyes pierce our very souls.

He was with Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

He was also filled with the Holy Spirit on that great day. And he may well have spoken in tongues—a point that cannot be proved nor disproved.

But one thing is sure, John was with Peter at the revival in Samaria (Acts 8:15-17) when the Holy Spirit was gloriously given. And this happened after the hands of the apostles had been laid upon the Samaritan Christians: *yet there is absolutely no suggestion that the Samaritan Christians spoke with tongues when they were Spirit-filled.*

Most certainly these Samaritan Christians were in a situation of extreme isolation and would need every vestige of spiritual help that could be recommended. Yet Peter and John, fresh from the rather recent great Day of Pentecost, apparently were neither disappointed by the fact that the Samaritans did not speak with tongues nor did they urge them to seek tongues.

Now let us turn to the glorious writings which John left as an undying legacy. Where would the Christian world be had it been denied the Johannine literature?

In his writings, John makes more references to the ministry of the Holy Spirit than does any other New Testament writer except St. Paul. What is more, John was probably more intimately acquainted with the Lord than any of the other apostles. He is described as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." Consider also that John records more of the deeper-life statements of Christ than any other Gospel writer. Among such are the Upper Room Discourse in chapters 14 through 16 of his Gospel, and the great High-Priestly prayer in chapter 17. Among these rich statements are many references to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

But John does not make one single reference to speaking in tongues either in fact or in promise.

In John's Gospel and in his Epistles there are 28 chapters—all of them completely silent on the tongues issue.

Someone may ask, "How about the Book of Revelation?" True, it was part of John's great legacy of literature also. In this book there are visions of ecstatic grandeur, predicted tribulations of indescribable horror. Here, above

all other Johannine writings, there might be expected some reference to the ecstatic utterance of speaking in tongues.

But the Book of Revelation is awesomely silent on the subject.

So, as John steps down from the witness stand, I have an even deeper sense of somber warning that speaking in tongues is not a New Testament recommendation. A red flag of warning should begin to wave before us all.

Fifth Witness: St. Paul

The old apostle from Tarsus strides with steady pace to the witness stand. Rugged is his appearance, piercing his eyes, bold with a courage forged in the heat of suffering, weighted down with a sense of destiny for Gentile Christianity.

What does Paul have to say about speaking in tongues?

First, we note that he was not present at Pentecost when the Church was born. But we are reasonably sure that the news of the tongues phenomenon of that great Day had been described to him very clearly.

On his third missionary journey, St. Paul started the church at Ephesus. This is recorded in Acts, chapter 19. Here it is stated that those who received the Holy Spirit "spoke with tongues, and prophesied" (v. 6). The very biblical wording here reminds us that these utterances were prophetic. Prophecy in the Bible was either foretelling things to come or forthtelling things that had already happened. Whatever else happened at Ephesus, these newly Spirit-baptized believers were sounding forth God's message, and this was no jargon of meaningless syllables.

Some years later Paul wrote the winsome and weighty Epistle to the Ephesians. In that short letter the work of the Holy Spirit is mentioned five times. But note carefully: *not once in the Ephesian letter does Paul either refer back to the original beginning when they spoke with tongues, nor does*

he make one least reference to such an experience as being valuable or valid. His silence regarding tongues in the Ephesian letter is nothing short of a stern rebuke to those who would seek or recommend tongues.

As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was well aware of the precarious position in which these early churches were placed in that vile, pagan world. He reminded them that they must have the fullness of the Holy Spirit to survive in the wicked environment which squeezed them in. They required God's best spiritual solution for moral pollution. Paul's answer was the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

But note it carefully again: *While he urged the Christians to seek the Holy Spirit, not once did Paul recommend speaking in tongues as an aid for these beleaguered churches.*

Paul desired their spiritual best. Is it not very strange, then, that in addressing himself to the Romans, the Ephesians, the Colossians, the Galatians, the Philippians, the Thessalonians, he utterly ignored tongues even as a desired experience?

Not that Paul was ignorant of such an exercise. The fact is, he knew more about it than any other New Testament writer. This would be evidenced by such scriptures as Acts 19:6 and I Corinthians 12—14. Yet despite all this he maintained a studied silence with reference to tongues. Not only in his letters to the churches, but also in his Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus we look in vain for any suggestion of value to be received from any such spiritual activity.

"Oh, yes," someone asks, "but how about Paul's letters to the Corinthians?" That is a good question, so let us give special attention to these; more specifically to First Corinthians, chapters 12 through 14.

A number of factors need to be carefully underlined.

Number One: In these few verses we have the total of

all references to speaking in tongues in all the Pauline writings.

Number Two: Speaking in tongues at Corinth had become, not a blessing, but a nagging, divisive, frustrating force in that new and embattled church.

Number Three: Paul here gives his fullest treatment to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, listing nine of them. He repeats these twice in chapter 12 (verses 7-10 and 28). And in both cases "diversity of tongues" is placed at the end of the list.

Number Four: With reference to these gifts, Paul plainly states that these gifts "worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, *dividing to every man severally as he will*" (I Cor. 12:11, italics mine). Every seeker after tongues should read and underline the last phrase of this scripture. For Paul states that these gifts are not open to public clamor, nor are they given as a result of frantic demand. Rather, the Holy Spirit sovereignly bestows these as He sees best.

Oh, yes, later in that same chapter Paul admonishes them to "covet [desire] earnestly the best gifts" (v. 31). But it is one thing to desire spiritual gifts; totally another to gather in prayer groups and demand with emotional fervency that such be given. Also, Paul urged them to desire the "best gifts," and is it not strange that the one of these listed gifts which is most earnestly sought is the least, not the best one?

If the Holy Spirit is commissioned by God Almighty to give these gifts as He deems best, elementary logic tells us that He cannot be pressured into giving any one gift willy-nilly as certain groups of Christians demand—and such yearning but opens doors of tragic consequence.

Number Five: This stated policy of sovereign bestowment of gifts by the Holy Spirit noted above is but a continuation of the earlier stated divine policy. For, as we noted earlier, on the Day of Pentecost the disciples spoke with tongues "as the Spirit gave them utterance." In both of

these strategic events, God's policy of gift-giving is clearly enunciated. And these two statements of this basic policy were enunciated some 20 years apart.

Number Six: Speaking in tongues was prevalent in Corinth but deep spirituality was sadly absent. In fact, in this church, which was highly vocal with "glossalalia," even blatant immorality was winked at. Take, for example, the tragic account of a mother and son who were living in open immorality (I Cor. 5:1).

If any person ever wishes to base his argument for speaking in tongues on any New Testament scripture to prove the spiritualizing value of the exercise, he is advised not to turn to these chapters. For tongues had become neither an evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit nor an aid to deeper devotional lives. The Corinthians were carnal, bickering, lived on an emotional binge, and were morally permissive to a tragic degree.

Number Seven: It must be said in all fairness that the term "tongues" (*glossalalia*—Greek) was the gift of an unlearned language. But it was always a language, never jargon. This gift could be of earth (dialect), as on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:8 clearly proves this by the use of the Greek word "*dialectos*" when describing the speaking in tongues at Pentecost.

Some scholars feel that St. Paul may have had reference to a language of heaven—which could be referred to as "ecstatic utterance"—when he said in the familiar first verse of chapter 13, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels."

Number Eight: Whether or not the "tongues" of Corinth were languages or ecstatic utterance, Paul warned against their easy abuse, and recommended such extreme regulations relative to their usage that it amounts to their virtual elimination as a viable spiritual exercise. Paul lists specific rules which were to be observed in the church at

Corinth regarding speaking in tongues. And it is a fair observation that the regulations spelled out for the Corinthians would apply equally to any other Christian group prepared to explore this dubious practice. Here are the regulations: (1) Never more than one to speak in tongues at once; they must take turns (14:27); (2) Never more than two, or at the most three, in any one meeting (14:27); (3) Not even one was to speak in tongues at all unless someone was present with the gift of interpretation (14:28).

These clearly delineated rules say as plainly as language can that St. Paul was discouraging speaking in tongues in Corinth. So, whether one feels that the tongues of First Corinthians meant "languages of earth" only, or whether they might refer to a "language of heaven," both face a solid fact: *Paul discouraged the practice in Corinth and by his fluent silence discouraged it in all the churches of the Gentile world.*

Someone may well ask, "But what about I Cor. 14:18?" That, too, is a good question. I stated in Chapter 3 that one could approach a study of Scripture by the "WOE" ("Weight Of Evidence") route or by the "IS" ("Isolated Scripture") route. Most certainly there are some scriptures which, if taken in isolation, could appear to sanction speaking in tongues. One such is I Cor. 14:18: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all." Another verse is I Cor. 14:39: "Forbid not to speak with tongues." These are about all of the scriptures which, as long as you take the "IS" approach, seem to support speaking in tongues. And no scholar would say for certainty that Paul referred to ecstatic utterance in either of these cases. In I Cor. 14:18 he may well have been saying that he was a linguist, for he undoubtedly did speak at least three languages fluently—Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic.

But if these two scriptures were given the most lenient interpretation regarding ecstatic utterance, they are so over-

whelmed by the "Weight Of Evidence" noted earlier in the witness of St. Paul that they are utterly insignificant. Certainly they are unworthy of being a foundation for such an emphasis as is now sweeping sections of Christendom.

There are over 2,000 verses in the Pauline writings alone, and only two, even on the surface, might be considered to give any suggestion of the practice. No sound scholar would ever consider giving credence to an important doctrine which had such flimsy foundation.

There are approximately 8,000 verses in the entire New Testament, and only these two can, by any measure of imagination, suggest any possible basis for seeking tongues. Two out of 8,000! There is not one practice of Christian living, not one doctrine in Christian theology which rests on such meagre support.

Let any who give their tacit approval to, or engage in the search for, tongues give this fact careful consideration.

Most certainly, the so-called gift of speaking in tongues could not be classified as a Bible-based doctrine when these undeniable facts are frankly faced.

* * *

Well, we have had five witnesses on the stand to give their testimony relative to speaking in tongues. Let us summarize their testimony.

These five gave us a large percentage of the New Testament, so what they say can be safely considered the voice of the New Testament.

Four of these five witnesses totally ignored the tongues issue, inferring that it is nonessential in any search for spirituality.

The one witness who discussed tongues warned in strenuous language against its easy abuse. Of his total testimony, he omitted any reference to it when corresponding with the more spiritual churches. When he wrote with a

broken heart to the church which was staggering through the morass of spiritual darkness, he declared that tongues was inferior to any other possible spiritual gift. At the same time it was a major part of their dilemma.

It is our candid summary that any Christian who deeply yearns to be a New Testament Christian cannot afford to seek this gift nor find his spiritual fellowship among those who do.

5

What Is Our Present Challenge?

We have faced up to the tongues issue fairly and, I hope, squarely. In the light of this evaluation is there not a challenge which we must face up to also?

Indeed there is a stern but rewarding challenge; the challenge is at least fourfold.

1. *The Challenge to Personalize Our Holiness Ministry*

We are holiness ministers, and proud of it! We are members of a holiness church, and glad of it! But we must reaffirm that there is no holiness apart from the Holy Spirit. Have we, perchance, so long described ourselves by the grand word "holiness" that we think of the term as devoid of the personality of the Holy Spirit? Have we inclined to depersonalize holiness?

Earlier leaders in the Holiness Movement admonished us to keep the Holy Spirit central in all our discussion of

holiness. They used to tell us that it was better to testify, "The Holy Spirit is my Sanctifier," than it was to flatly say, "I am sanctified wholly."

Let us, in pew and pulpit, begin to inject the Holy Spirit into our speaking, preaching, and testifying more than we have done. *The challenge is to personalize holiness.*

Then, also, let us keep a strong, positive note in our references to the work of the Holy Spirit. Of course we know that on the Day of Pentecost there was a negative work—inbred sin was cleansed from their hearts (their hearts were purified by faith). But let us note again that the infilling of the Holy Spirit infused a positive dynamic which they had not known before.

No church thrives on a dominantly negative note. We are wise to reemphasize the strong, positive, and appealing promises that Jesus stated would be fulfilled in the Spirit's coming. The Holy Spirit would lead; He would teach; He would guide—and these three promises alone are enough to bring a shout into the soul of the sojourner on today's complex moral highways.

We are correct in our strong negation of tongues, but we are not wise if, at the same time, we neglect the other positive promises that Jesus said would follow the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Peter sounded a positive note when he testified to the Jerusalem church concerning the Gentiles that the Holy Spirit "bare them witness" (Acts 15:8). We all yearn to hear again that the Holy Spirit brings a witness—an assurance.

Paul had a fabulously appealing thought in I Corinthians 13 when he spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit as cleansing the spirit of man from jealousy and hatred and pettiness, so man could spread a love balm over his community. This is a positive note.

And this type of witness can never be imitated or counterfeited. Its aroma and its appeal are universal and never outdated.

So challenge number one is to "put the Holy Spirit back into holiness."

2. *The Challenge to Better Shepherd Our Seekers*

We rejoice in seekers after righteousness; and rightly so. But perhaps we need to add another statistic—those who receive assurance.

It is a great victory when a sinner seeks and finds salvation at our altars. But it really is a grander moment when the Spirit witnesses that he has become a child of God. If that witness comes immediately at the altar, no real problem exists. But if there is some delay, the new convert needs shepherding until the Spirit brings the witness. For that period, whether short or long, is critical indeed.

It is a grand moment when the Christian comes to the altar to seek heart cleansing and the baptism with the Holy Spirit. But how essential it is that he be reminded that there can be a witness just as valid to the second work as there was to the first.

Again, if that witness to heart purity comes right while he tarries at the altar, well and good. But if there is some delay, then shepherding must be done, for Satan will linger near to whisper suggestions into the spiritual ear of that seeker after the witness of the Holy Spirit.

That Christian should be encouraged to testify frequently to the fact that his consecration is complete, that his faith is fixed—and that he yearns for the "Voice from heaven." This will help other Christians to stand by with prayer and compassion. Perhaps we should even suggest that there is a place at the altar for any who have not yet received the witness of the Holy Spirit to entire sanctification.

My witness came some two weeks after I settled the matter at the altar. And a glow like a sunset after rain lingers around that moment resplendent when the Holy Spirit

brought the direct witness to my inner heart that He had come in His fullness.

Challenge number two, then, is to do a better job of shepherding our people while they seek for the witness of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The Challenge to Cherish Emotional Expression in Our Services*

Our church's future is bright with promise. But it can be yet brighter if we safeguard it by purposely cultivating the feeling element among our people.

Dr. P. F. Bresee, two generations ago, shouted from his pulpit, "Keep the glory down!" It was his avowed policy to cultivate the emotional aspects of his people's lives. And he did it even though doing such might result in some extremism.

We may be better educated than our fathers but we still like to feel our religion. We respond eagerly and fully in a church atmosphere which is freighted with the movings of the Holy Spirit. We love it; we thrive on it; it is our native air. And any minister or layman in the church who dislikes this kind of church atmosphere is a weight on the wheels of progress.

The day is upon us when our young people demand the evident blessing of God upon our church services—sermon or no sermon. Since the early days of strong emotional movings we have seen days of lessened emotional expression. But the pendulum is swinging back. Praise the Lord!

And our challenge is to cherish and encourage the deep yearnings of our people. They may not say, "Amen," like their grandparents did, but they want to feel their religion nevertheless—even though they may respond differently.

We must keep the intellectual content in our ministry respectable. Our people must think their way through spiritual problems as well as pray through them. They must be

trained to volitionalize their convictions. But they also deeply desire to feel God in the house of worship. When they have satisfying emotional experiences they will not soon be seeking tongues in strange circles.

4. *Our Challenge to Be an Evangelistic Anchor*

I can still hear that querying teen-ager who asked me in utter sincerity, "How come there is more excitement in the tongues meetings than in our own church?"

To that emotionally oriented teen-ager, "excitement" was the pulsebeat and the measuring stick of spirituality. And it is really not easy to argue against religious excitement—something like arguing against mother or Christmas. The Early Church had its share of excitement—periods when it was really the "talk of the town." "These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also," was one reporter's apprehensive way of commenting about the fact that Paul and his party had come to town. Excitement was knee-deep everywhere.

Yes, there were undoubtedly times of keen excitement in the ministry of the apostles, but it would be unfair and inaccurate to say that such moments characterized their entire ministry. In the Acts we are more impressed with the labors, the midnight prayer meetings in prison, the opposition, the loneliness, than with the times of intense spiritual excitement.

So while we all enjoy times of spiritual ecstasy, we are well reminded that the Church of Jesus Christ has been built most basically by people who have kept their spirits warm, have set firm and positive goals, and have held steadfastly to those goals—excitement or no excitement. Read Hebrews 11 again—that fabulous "Gallery of the Faithful." It speaks of those who "obtained a good report through faith" but makes no reference to those who gorged themselves on a diet of spiritual excitement.

Our church has had its full share of times of blessing. But it has also earned a reputation as an evangelistic anchor. In union campaigns, for example, our people are recognized as being spiritually reliable, dependable in prayer, and generous in their giving. It may not seem to be exciting to make substantial pledges to revival efforts, or to join small groups in earnest prayer. But this is the stuff that has built the Christian Church.

If we will keep our anchor position through lean times and fat, if we can be counted on to hold the center of the line in times of evangelism, we will do the full cause of evangelism more good than to be addicts of spiritual excitement.

We stand with those in the historic position as anchors in the midstream of evangelism. We are counted on solidly among the evangelical forces of our day.

Ours is the challenge of the anchor position.

* * *

This, then, is the fourfold challenge of the near tomorrows.

This is facing the tongues issue.

About this book...

In this brief treatment, Dr. Oke does indeed "face the tongues issue." In his inimitable way, he points out from the Scriptures the false premises and the flimsy foundations of the tongues position. But he also points the finger inward, challenging the Church to "come alive" and meet more adequately the needs of its people who deeply long for a greater warmth and vitality in personal spiritual experience.