

Q&A – Unknown Tongues

"What are your thoughts on Unknown Tongues?"

When I was a little kid, I heard my mom speak in tongues. We went to a liturgical Lutheran church; so, listening to my mom having this experience was downright bizarre. In fact, my mom actually experienced unknown tongues (a.k.a., glossolalia) before she had ever actually heard anyone else do it.

I remember my mom was always trying to drag us to this one pentecostal church in town. The whole family would object: "Pleeeeeease MOM!... Don't make us go because that's the freaky church!" In fact, one time, my mom dragged my cousin & I there in 6th grade. At the end of the Sunday school class, they asked: "*Would anyone like to receive Christ?*" And, I looked at my cousin Andy & said: "Dude, don't do it! ... Don't raise your hand!" Because, I knew that they would make you stay after and tell you more about Jesus. And they might even make you pray in tongues!! (How awful!)

And sure enough, Andy raised his hand anyway! In my heart I was like: "NOOOO!" I imagined myself diving in slow motion to save him! (pardon the pun). And sure enough he gave his life to Christ. (& I had to sit there for an extra 10 minutes!) So, the great irony, ...the great divine joke in God's mind was that he decided to turn Peter Haas into a preacher.

But the reason I shared that story is because I've always been a skeptical guy. Even after I was a Christian it took me years to work through the tongues issue. And today: I do believe in unknown tongues... I do experience them on a regular basis. But, it was a slow process for me.

So, if you're reading this and you're wondering: "Are you one of those freaky churches?" No. After all, like Paul in 1 Cor.14, I also believe in the level-headed use of these gifts. Yet, we're also a church that is passionate about the truth. And what kind of pastor would I be if I ignored 8 chapters worth of over 110 verses on unknown tongues? But unfortunately, that's what a lot of churches do: They simply ignore the whole topic of tongues. Yet, in my opinion, that's disrespectful to God & his Word.

God put unknown tongues in his Word for a reason. So, as I expound on this issue a bit more in this essay, I want to comfort those of you who are intimidated about his issue: You don't have to agree with me on tongues in order to attend Substance. In fact, you can be in leadership here and not speak in tongues.

I've been writing about this issue for seventeen years; YET, I'm the 1st to admit that there are many gray areas regarding this gift. So, feel free to draw your own conclusions. I'll try to be clear about the areas that are extremely gray.

So, a good place to start is in 1 Corinthians chapter 14. The Apostle Paul is talking about how to use tongues properly in large gatherings. Prior to this, this unknown tongues phenomenon keeps showing up. It showed up the 1st time in Acts chapter 2; then, Acts chapters 10,11, 19. In fact, at the end of the Gospel of Mark, it says that tongues are one of the distinguishing signs of a believer.

But, clearly, the Corinthians were taking it too far. So, Paul writes in 1 Cor 14:1, "*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.* [So, Paul is asking: why do it in church?]

³ But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but [in church] I would rather have you prophesy."

Then Paul gives all sorts of reasons, the first of which is: People will think you're crazy!

But then, I want to stop here and ask the question: WHY Tongues at all? "What then is the point of the experience?" Well, the Bible gives numerous reasons for this. Notice Vs. 4, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (Edifies" means "to build one up"). So, the 1st Reason is this: (1). Personal Edification: i.e., it's a form of prayer or worship that builds you up. But that's not all it does. In fact, listen to this.

"Dr. Carl Peterson – a professor from Tulsa OK, is also a brain specialist. While doing research on the relationship between the brain and praying or speaking in tongues. Some amazing things were discovered. Through research and testing, Dr. Peterson found that as we pray in tongues, the brain releases two chemical secretions that are directed to our immune system – giving a 35-40% boost in the immune system. This promotes a healing within our bodies. Amazingly, this secretion is triggered from a part of the brain that has no other apparent activity in humans and we don't use it except when activated by our prayer and worship in tongues." Isn't that totally bizarre. People have actually done brain scans on this issue.

I was recently reading the N.Y. Times and they did an entire story on unknown tongues called "A Neuroscientific Look at Speaking in Tongues." They scanned people's brains while they did it so that they might identify what's going on. The article was saying that: "Tongue talkers have the stereotype of being "emotionally unstable"... but "Contrary to what may be a common perception, studies suggest that people who speak in tongues rarely suffer from mental problems. A recent study of nearly 1,000 evangelical Christians in England found that those who engaged in the practice were more emotionally stable than those who did not."

I mean, who would have thought that the N.Y. Times would be defending tongue talkers! Now, I'm not trying to say that, unless you speak in tongues, you're emotionally unstable. Rather, all I'm trying to say is: "What if the Bible is true?" What if it actually *does* edify us? What if we get to heaven and realize: "Wow, I can't believe that such a silly thing made a huge difference!"

The 2nd Reason for tongues in scripture is that it's a gateway to the supernatural. For example, Acts 1:8 says "You will receive power when the H.S. comes on you." And one of the primary evidences of the Holy Spirit that the apostles looked for was unknown tongues.

For example, there's this classic Azusa Street Revival account of a Jewish man who was a scholar that lectured against Christianity. He'd tour through synagogues, teaching the Jews how to intellectually debate with Christians. So, he'd regularly sneak into churches to listen to preachers. And on this occasion, he had specifically traveled to L.A. to check out this tongues phenomenon at Azusa Street Mission Church.

A woman named Kathleen Scott saw him and felt a super specific unknown tongue for him. While she spoke over him, he was mesmerized. And immediately afterwards, people began sharing testimonies about what God was doing in the meeting.

The sullen Jewish man immediately went to the front and began addressing the entire assembly:

'I am a Jew, and I came to this city to investigate this speaking in tongues. No person in this

city knows my first or my last name, as I am here under an assumed name. No one in this city knows my occupation, or anything about me. I go to hear preachers for the purpose of taking their sermons apart, and using them in lecturing against the Christian religion. 'This girl, as I entered the room, started speaking in the Hebrew language. She told me my first name and my last name, and she told me why I was in the city and what my occupation was in life, and then she called upon me to repent. She told me things about my life which it would be impossible for any person in this city to know.' Then, right on the spot,, the man dropped to his knees, repented, and wept in front of the whole assembly."

You see: Tongues isn't merely for personal edification. On rare occasion, God will still use them in an evangelistic way. But the reason I'm pointing this out is because there are actually two types of tongues in scripture.

Notice 1 Cor. 14:2 *"² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit."* I.e., this tongue has nothing to do with other people. (It's for you & God). Then *why*, in Acts 2, were they using them for "other people?" It's because there are two functions of unknown tongues. I.e., two types.

The first type is what I call "personal tongues." It's between you & God. It's for *your* edification. You can choose when to do it. But the second type is what I like to call "prophetic tongues." It's a specific unknown tongue that is used for *another person's* edification. You can't "choose" when to do it because only God can give it to you. I.e., it's a divinely inspired tongue for a specific person or situation. Of course, it's important that you understand this distinction or else, 1 Cor. 14 will make no exegetical sense.

Paul is essentially saying: If you're all using your "personal tongues" people will say: "You're out of your mind" v.23. But, if you have a prophetic tongue (for men... not for God), then, still... at least interpret it.

This means, the person who understands it: say something. Or, pray that God gives you a revelation about your own tongue. Or, lastly, "just shut-up and keep it to yourself," Paul writes.

But here's the deal: I could literally could write hundreds more pages explaining how all of this works. And, like most people, I'm sure you all have a lot of questions. But, instead, I wrote a book on it called: *The Skeptic's Guide to Tongues & Prophecy*

Of course, the whole point of the free manual is to take on some of the toughest questions I've ever heard on this issue and give some level headed responses. In fact, on my backstage pass page, there's a link to a free pdf version of this book:

But once again, you don't have to agree with me on this issue to come be a part of Substance. We've made the decision to not make this issue a hallmark of Substance's mission. Some people have had this doctrine shoved down their throats. Thus, the spirit of this experience has been lost amidst charismatic legalism. Hopefully, you won't experience this from any of our members.

But here's the big picture. God has devoted over eight chapters to this experience. And, I'm pretty sure he had a purpose in doing that. So, as you safely and Biblically explore this issue, I pray that you'd keep an open mind. God just might give you an experience like Cornelius in Acts chapter eight. After all, look at me. It's clear that God has a sense of humor! And *that's* what the kingdom of God is all about: *"righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit"* (Rom 14:17).