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NATURE OF TONGUES- SPEAKING

CHARISMATISM'S ERRORS REFUTED!

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The practice of “tongues-speaking” is very commonly encouraged by the Pentecostals and Charismatics. They typically claim that tongues-speaking not only helps them to communicate intimately with God, but also to “release” the power of God to perform miracles, as evidenced by the following two testimonies:

“It had always been my heart's desire for my spirit to communicate with God, yet it just didn't happen for me... Then, I listened to one of Joseph Prince's messages on praying in tongues. Toward the end of the sermon, he prayed over everyone and said, ‘Okay, now everyone begin to speak in tongues. Just begin to push it out!’ And that's exactly what I did! To my amazement, I was praying in tongues and I was refreshed in a way that I never thought possible. My faith and trust in God were increased.”

(Excerpt taken from <http://www.josephprince.org/daily-grace/praise-reports/single/finally-praying-in-tongues>)

“Praying in tongues leads to roadside miracle... After lunch, I continued praying in tongues and began to notice something really cool going on. It literally began to feel like cool, oxygenated water was starting to churn in my belly! The more I prayed, the more it spread until it seemed to be circulating in my entire body! It was amazing. That afternoon, I left work and felt led by the Spirit to stop and talk to a man who was working in a field

on the side of the road, so I stopped. It turned out that he was already saved, but he had never heard of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. I told him about it and asked if I could pray with him to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. He allowed me to pray with him and he received it on the spot! In fact, not only did he receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Jesus healed him of extreme knee pain and a shoulder problem that did not allow him to lift his arm above his shoulder!”

(Excerpt taken from <http://www.josephprince.org/daily-grace/praise-reports/single/praying-in-tongues-leads-to-road-side-miracle>)

How strange it is to think that “tongues-speaking” can be “pushed out” of one’s mouth at will! Is it not a gift, just like all other spiritual gifts, which God bestows sovereignly according to His will? Can mere man claim a spiritual gift and exercise it by sheer willpower? Is tongues-speaking really a means to working miracles? Confusion arising from questions such as the above-mentioned must be dispelled in the light of Scripture. This article (and the next) will attempt to refute prevalent Charismatic teachings (and their erroneous practice) regarding tongues-speaking and, in the process, provide a biblical understanding of tongues-speaking.

MODERN TONGUES-SPEAKING IS DIAMETRICALLY DIFFERENT FROM BIBLICAL TONGUES-SPEAKING

The modern tongues-speaking gives a pretended impression that it is patterned

after the biblical kind of tongues-speaking. Notwithstanding, there is absolutely no evidence to back up their preposterous claim. While modern tongues-speaking is nothing more than utterances of meaningless gibberish, the biblical gift of tongues was manifested as real languages spoken around the known civilised world. This is corroborated by the account in Acts 2. In Acts 2, the only portion of Scripture where the exact nature of tongues is described, the tongues-speaking is clearly mentioned as declaring God's Word in a human language that is unknown to the speaker.

From Acts 2:5, we know that many of the Jews dispersed around the world had returned to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. Next, vv. 6-8 report that these Jews heard the apostles of Christ speaking meaningful, authentic messages in their native languages – “Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” The apostles were miraculously enabled by the Holy Spirit to communicate spiritual truths fluently in foreign languages which they were unfamiliar with. They were not speaking in one and the same foreign language, but actually in multiple foreign languages, which were readily identified by the people who were of such various nationalities as “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers

in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians” (vv. 9-11a)!

Most of the apostles, being Galileans (i.e. men who dwelt in the northern part of Israel), were not conversant in languages other than Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek. Other native Judaeans in the crowd could not understand their speech as they were uttering the divine truths in foreign languages. So, they mockingly accused the apostles of being drunken (v. 13). But Peter explained to them that they were not intoxicated (vv. 14-15), only that they were filled with the Spirit. Moreover, the foreigners (who had heard the apostles speaking in tongues) testified that “we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (v. 11b). Beyond a shadow of a doubt, the apostles were declaring “the wonderful works of God” in words understood by the foreigners of various nationalities, very unlike the repeated utterances of meaningless sounds of the modern Pentecostals and Charismatics!

MODERN TONGUES-SPEAKING PRODUCES NOT WORDS, BUT MEANINGLESS SOUNDS

While modern tongues-speaking is nothing but unintelligible stammering and nonsensical utterance, the New Testament gift of tongues was a supernaturally endowed ability to speak fluently and accurately a divine message in a foreign language. Though Pentecostals

and Charismatics depict their practice with the same biblical designation as the New Testament tongues-speaking, it is abundantly clear that their practice has no similarity with the biblical record of tongues.

Advocates of modern tongues-speaking counter by arguing that their gift is not the same as that of Acts 2, but rather of a different kind. They refer to the apostle Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:1 – regarding “the tongues of men and of angels” – to assert that the “tongues” spoken by them are tongues “of angels” (i.e. heavenly languages), not tongues “of men” (i.e. earthly languages). They justify this by insisting that the “tongues” mentioned in 1 Corinthians (viz. chapters 12-14) constitute a different kind of tongues-gift from those described in the book of Acts. Their underlying motivation is to come up with an excuse – any excuse, it seems – for their unintelligible utterances to be biblically accepted. They staunchly reiterate that because they speak so-called “angelic” languages, their tongues-speaking is therefore indiscernible in the realm of human experience.

However, a close examination of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians proves the fallacy of their argument. Evidently, Paul was using a form of hyperbole (an exaggeration for emphasis' sake) in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. He was not affirming that the early Christians were speaking in angelic language. Paul was merely saying in v. 1 that even though a Christian could communicate in an angelic language, he would be nothing but a distracting noise

if he did not exercise love. Paul continued that form of hyperbolic language in the following two verses. In v. 3, he said, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” It goes without saying that Paul was not here asserting that he had given everything to the poor or that he did give his body to be burned. In the same vein, Paul was also not asserting that he spoke in angelic tongues. His argument does not hint whatsoever of a mysterious, unintelligible string of utterances. In fact, the converse is implied – i.e. coherent sentences of words were produced, not meaningless sounds. The truth of the matter is that nothing in Paul's writings indicates that the Corinthian tongues-speaking was any different from that of Acts 2, as falsely conjectured by the Pentecostals and Charismatics!

CONCLUSION

Hence, we conclude that the modern tongues-speaking is totally unbiblical. It is nowhere similar to the gift of tongues that was bestowed by the Holy Spirit in the early church, as recorded in the New Testament. Today's tongues-speaking is a humanly learned practice. It should be rejected by the church as a counterfeit phenomenon.

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