

SHUNDULA

By Ted Wise

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A Testimony About Tongues The Bible and Me

At one time in the not too distant past, one of the major issues that modern Christians were fighting over was what the Bible calls the gift of tongues. Spiritual gifts, particularly speaking in tongues, became one of those subjects about which everyone had a passionate opinion. Soon the squabbling became so intense that Christians began to avoid talking about it and an important truth was lost in the effort to maintain peace. I remember feeling like practically all my friends and mentors figuratively put their fingers in their ears and said, "Tongues? I got your tongues, blaa, blaa, blaa". However, that's not an option we really have. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware." (1 Corinthians 12:1). In the light of that statement we cannot simply avoid the sticky tricky stuff in the Bible.

Paul went on to write, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

When one reads all that the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts, it is hard to see why the gift of speaking in a language one has not learned could become such an impassioned issue that it would cause bitter disputes and the breakup of congregations. To this day it is still a volatile theological point. Many church pastors do not teach what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts. Some have invented theologies that relegate the gifts of the Spirit to the first century church. Lost within all the opinions voiced about the gifts of Spirit is an even more serious problem that has to do with how we understand the Word of God in the first place.

In fact we maintain this web site, in part, to promote what we believe to be good Bible scholarship. We count ourselves among those who believe that as true Christians we do indeed have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. When we seek to understand a passage of scripture, we start with prayer and a hermeneutical strategy. I use the good old basic big three: What does it say? What does it mean? and the all important THEREFORE, or what should I do? Faith is only alive in that last one; what should I do? Obviously one needs to know that faith without good works is dead and to only "know" something is, at best, empty learning if it isn't put to work.

Recently, we who work in this cybernetic vineyard had this question put to us and I chose to answer it.

To: PBC

Do you have to speak in tongues to be born again? I would say no based on 1 Corinthians 14 where Paul wrote

about Desiring Spiritual gifts. What do you think?

Thank you,

EB.

Dear EB.,

The late Pastor Ray Stedman was my friend, teacher and mentor. I brought him nearly the same question shortly after I met him in the late 60's. For a brief time I thought I had the gift of speaking in tongues, so my good friend Carl Gallivan arranged a lunch meeting with Ray without telling me what he was up to. The lunch was pleasant enough but a bit rushed because Ray and Carl both had places they needed to be. Perhaps it was the pressure of time constraints or maybe it was the Holy Spirit active in Ray's life. He had always been cordial and patient with my ignorance of the Bible but this day he turned rather suddenly to me and bluntly asked me if I thought I had the gift of tongues. I replied that I did and he then asked me one of the most profound questions I have ever been asked.

Profundity is not always apparent but over the years I have asked literally hundreds of other tongue speaking Christians the same question Ray put to me. Please allow me to pass it on to you because you undoubtedly are or will be involved in many "discussions" with Christian brothers and sisters over the issue of tongues.

Ray asked, "Ted, how do you know what you are doing is what the Apostles did in the book of Acts?"

I had no answer. Dan, a friend who had accompanied me, said rather timidly, "By faith?" That didn't seem to be answer enough to satisfy me let alone answer Ray's question. The plain truth was that I didn't have the slightest idea if what I was calling tongues was the actual Biblical gift of tongues. Ray Stedman, like Jesus, often taught by asking me questions I couldn't answer.

Among my tongue speaking friends there circulated at least half a dozen different ideas about the gift of tongues. They ranged from the convoluted, complicated, out of context verse reading to the overly simplified, "...just open your mouth, trust the Holy Spirit and start talking". Do that and sure enough, out would come the old "shundula, shundula...". Shundula was a popular word among tongue speakers in those days. The problem with that kind of test is that even my non-Christian friends could do it.

Eventually in my younger years I was able to justify, if only to myself, the rather un-biblical notion that maybe one could have a private two person prayer language, understood by God, who of course hears our hearts and could discern its meaning quite easily. I based this on the fact that He certainly heard and answered a lot of barely comprehensible prayers that I voiced in English. However, once again I failed to answer Ray's question. I still didn't know if that was what the believers were doing in the First Century Church. These days, I'm certain that wasn't what our Church Fathers were doing.

Finally I came to rest. According to the Book of Romans, we all face the same problem everyday. As Paul wrote, "For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish." (Rom 7:19). Our moment by moment dilemma is: are we walking according to the Spirit or are we walking according to the flesh? The tongues issue is no different. In the early Church and today all speaking gifts of the Spirit are governed by this one rule, the Apostles spoke as, "...the Spirit was giving them utterance". Spirit versus the flesh is always the

issue because our flesh loves to be religious. No matter what language I speak, I must be sure of my motivation. As James wrote about the power of words, "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless." (James 1:26).

English is a tongue. Had there been by some kink in time English speaking Jews present in the crowd on that great Pentecostal beginning of the Church, they might have heard some of the Apostles speaking English but only as, "...the Spirit was giving them utterance." (Acts 2:4). The key to understanding what the scriptures are about is the Holy Spirit and no matter what language or to whom I might be speaking, it is only fruitful if I speak as the Spirit gives me utterance.

I resolved to only speak in tongues if I was certain that it was the Spirit and not some urge prompted by my flesh to simply appear spiritual to my friends. That was many years ago and I'm still waiting. I have learned from the Bible that a lot of what is going on in the Church isn't the gift of tongues and furthermore, that it definitely is not a sign that one is born again, filled with the Spirit or anything else unless it is clearly what the early Church was doing in the book of Acts. It is the Biblical gift of tongues only if it is the same thing the Apostles were doing.

And what were the Apostles doing when they spoke in tongues? They were speaking known languages, "Cretans and Arabs-- we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." (Acts 2:11). And they were speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance. Go and do likewise.

In Christ's love,

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[Ray Stedman's Studies of Tongues in the Bible](#)

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