

Tongues

Summary

In the gospel of Mark, the Lord Jesus Christ foretold that His followers would speak with new tongues as one of five signs to confirm the word to unbelievers.

A few days after Jesus' ascension, the Holy Spirit enabled believers in Christ to speak in different languages (i.e., tongues) they had not learned, communicating the wonderful works of God in the native tongues of the Jews and Jewish proselytes gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Pentecost. While it cannot be known for certain, this miraculous phenomenon appears to have occurred two more times over the next approximately 30 years of early church history, as recorded in the book of Acts.

In the epistle of 1Corinthians, speaking different kinds of tongues and the interpretation of tongues are said to be two of the spiritual gifts given to the body of Christ. As with all the other gifts, they are given to some but not all members. The apostle Paul, writing the commandments of the Lord, acknowledges tongues as a gift while correcting its misuse at the Church of Corinth.

The apostle emphasizes that if speaking with tongues is to edify others, as all gifts should, the languages should be understood by the hearers. Therefore, speaking in a language unknown to others is not allowed in the church unless it is interpreted. He also reiterates Jesus' emphasis that the purpose of tongues is a sign to unbelievers.

Those with the gift of interpretation of tongues translate unknown foreign languages so they are understandable to the hearers.

Study of Tongues

1. Tongues means languages. The word "tongue" has three basic meanings in the Bible:
 - a. the physical member of the body (Psalm 22:15; 34:13; James 3:5),
 - b. a type of speech, such as a wholesome or a lying tongue (Prov 15:4; 21:6), and
 - c. a language, such as the Hebrew tongue (Jn 5:2, Acts 1:9; 2:8; 21:40; Rev 5:9).
"Tongue" means language (singular). "Tongues" mean languages (plural) (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11). In the New Testament, the Greek word used is γλώσσα, transliterated glossa, pronounced gloce-sah.

In this study, "tongue" refers to language (singular) and "tongues" refers to languages (plural) according to 1c above.

2. Tongues are for a sign. Jesus foretold that His followers would speak with new tongues as a sign (Mark 16:17, 18).

And 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.

Tongues

New tongues were one of the signs, along with casting out devils, taking up serpents, not being hurt if they drink any deadly thing, and healing by laying hands on the sick.

Not only Jesus, but Paul also says tongues are for a sign in 1Corinthians 14.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.
(1Cor 14:22)

Note: Many textual critics think that these last verses in Mark's Gospel were a later addition and not part of the original text. Many other critics disagree. However, a reader will notice that the main argument presented in this study does not depend on the Mark passage.

3. Tongues are for a sign to confirm the word. The purpose of signs was to authenticate, verify, and make believable the word being preached (Mark 16:20; Heb 2:4; 2Cor 12:12). These supernatural events confirmed the apostles' extraordinary claim of the gospel. Tongues were one of these signs.

And 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. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (Mark 16:17-20)

The first occurrence of tongues was on the day of Pentecost, where unbelieving Jews and Jewish proselytes were assembled in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5). The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues as Jesus had said (Acts 2:4). The Galilean disciples, though unlearned in foreign languages, communicated the wonderful works of God in the native tongues of those assembled (Acts 2:7-11).

While it cannot be known for certain, this miraculous phenomenon appears to have occurred only two more times over the next approximately 30 years of early church history, as recorded in the book of Acts (Acts 10:46; 19:6). Unlike Acts 2, there is no explanation of the tongues spoken in Acts 10:46 and 19:6. The languages spoken in these two instances could have been previously learned and their praise of God convinced the disciples of their salvation. However, the apostle Peter's recounting of the incident of Acts 10 may indicate that the Italian band in Acts 10 and the disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus (Acts 19) miraculously spoke in previously unlearned languages as the apostles did in Acts 2 (Acts 11:15-17).

With only three instances, at the most, recorded in Acts, this miraculous phenomenon cannot be assumed to be for all believers. There is no mention of tongues when the disciples were filled with the Spirit again in Acts 4:31, or when the Samaritans received the Spirit in Acts 8:17, or when the apostle Paul was filled in Acts 9:17. Numerous conversions are recorded in the book of Acts with no mention of tongues.

Tongues

Note: The purpose of tongues is a sign to confirm the word. The Bible never says speaking in tongues is evidence of the baptism or filling with the Holy Spirit. In the epistles, tongues are not linked to Spirit baptism or Spirit filling. Spirit baptism is the spiritual operation whereby the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 3:11) baptizes the sinner who trusts in Him into his spiritual body (1Cor 12:13) which is the Church (Eph 1:22,23). Thus all believers are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. This explains why the believer is never commanded anywhere in scripture to seek or pray for Spirit baptism--because the believer has already been baptized by the Spirit when he was saved by faith (1Cor 12:13; Acts 2:47; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26-28; 1Peter 2:2-5). The filling with the Spirit is a commandment to all believers (Eph 5:18) and results in Christ-like character (Gal 5:23,24), boldness to speak God's word (Psalm 39:3; Acts 2:4; 4:13,31; 13:9-11), praise, worship, thanksgiving, and submissiveness (Eph 5:18-33), leadership by the Spirit into God's will (Luke 4:1; Psalm 143:10), and giftedness to serve God as He has commanded (Ex 31:1-5; 36:1). The few instances where Spirit baptism, Spirit filling, and tongues occur together in the book of Acts should not be used to arbitrarily establish doctrine while disregarding the other pertinent verses in the Bible that explain these spiritual operations. Sound doctrine must consider and harmonize all verses that speak to a subject.

4. Tongues are human, foreign languages. The tongues spoken by the disciples on the day of Pentecost are clearly defined as human languages (Acts 2:2-11). The Galilean disciples communicated the wonderful works of God in the native tongues of those assembled from the surrounding nations (Acts 2:7-11).

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. (Acts 2:4-6)

The disciples spoke several different known languages without the need for interpreters to be understood.

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 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, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:8-11)

Acts 2 is the definitive passage in Acts where details about the tongues are provided. There is a clear description of the disciples of Christ speaking with tongues with the power and approval of God. The use of tongues was also on a much larger scale than the other two instances described in only one verse in Acts 10 (v 46) and only one verse in Acts 19 (v. 6). Elsewhere in Acts the word tongue is also used in the same way--to describe a regular human language (Acts 1:19; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). Although there is no explanation of the

Tongues

tongues spoken in Acts 10:46 and 19:6, Peter indicates the Gentiles in Acts 10 received the same gift of the Holy Spirit they had received years earlier (Acts 11:15-17). If the experience was the same as the apostles' in Acts 2, the tongues spoken were human languages that were understood by those present. In the latter two cases, they may have spoken only two or three different languages rather than over a dozen as occurred in Acts 2, based on the nationalities present at the time.

Paul corroborates that tongues are earthly languages in 1Cor 14:21, when he quotes Isaiah 28:11, "With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak to this people". From this quote in Isaiah, Paul references other nations of other earthly languages speaking to Israel.

Note: The Bible never says tongues are a heavenly language. Some think 1Cor 13:1, where Paul says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels", refers to an angelic language. This verse is simply hyperbole showing no matter how gifted a person could be in languages, it is worthless without love (see verses 2, 3). The Bible never references such a heavenly language. There is no instance cited where any Old Testament or New Testament believer speaks in such a language. The apostle Paul tells of a man (probably himself) who was caught up into paradise (the third heaven, where God dwells) and heard *unspeakable* words, which it is *not lawful for a man to utter* (2Cor 12:2-4). If there is a heavenly language, it surely would be spoken in heaven, and yet the words Paul heard there were *unspeakable*. Furthermore to say tongues (plural) is *a* (or *the*) heavenly language (singular) makes no sense. Tongues (plural) would have to be heavenly *languages* (plural). Biblically, speaking in tongues simply means speaking in languages (Acts 2:2-11; 22:2).

5. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers. 1Cor 14:21 and 22 declare that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers, not to believers. The speaking in tongues, as observed in Acts, was greatly used of God to propagate the Christian message to peoples of other nations. God had confounded men's languages at Babel (Gen 11). At the start of the church age, God used the gift of tongues to overcome the language barriers in somewhat of a reversal of Babel. Tongues confirmed the word to the unbelieving Jews and Jewish proselytes from the surrounding nations who had gathered for Pentecost, a Jewish feast day. By understanding the gospel in their own language, many were saved and took the message back to their people. To those who did not believe, tongues were a sign of judgment. The "men of other tongues" Paul references from Isa 28:11 were the enemies of Israel. Israel would not hear God's message by their own prophets, so men of other tongues would speak to them. The same sign that confirms the word for those who believe is a token of judgment for those who do not believe.

In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not. (1Cor 14:21,22)

Note: Some think tongues are for private prayer. The Bible never says that tongues are a devotional prayer language. Praying in tongues in private would not be a sign to

Tongues

unbelievers. This confusion is based partly on a misunderstanding of 1Cor 14:2-4. When a person speaks in a language unknown in the church, he speaks only to God because men cannot understand him. Thus he only edifies himself, not the church. 1Cor 14:2-4 is a rebuke for speaking in unknown tongues--not an encouragement to do so (1Cor 14:1-20). The subject under consideration in 1Cor 12 through 14 is the use of spiritual gifts in the church--not private prayer. In every case in Acts where tongues are spoken, they are spoken *in public*. Never is it private prayer.

Furthermore, if tongues are useful in praying to God, why would God only give this gift to some members of the church? Doesn't God desire for all believers to pray with the Spirit's power? Wouldn't God desire for all his children to speak to him in His language, the heavenly language? If God desires for believers to pray in tongues, why is the rest of scripture completely silent about this when prayer is discussed? In Romans 8, the Bible tells us how the Spirit helps us in prayer--and it is not through uttered languages--it is with groanings which *cannot* be uttered.

Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Rom 8:26)

If tongues are to be a sign to unbelievers, then speaking in tongues among only believers is also pointless.

6. "Different kinds of tongues" (the same as "Diversities of tongues") and "interpretation of tongues" are spiritual gifts given to the church (1Cor 12:10, 28). These gift names associated with tongues show the gifts to be the ability to speak or interpret "different" languages. This terminology is consistent with the speaking of earthly languages as in Acts 2. It is not consistent with tongues being *the* language of heaven. These names of the tongue gifts are applicable to the tongues in 1Cor 14 since the Apostle Paul has not changed the subject from chapter 12 through chapter 14. Again, the subject in these chapters is the use of spiritual gifts in the church.

In Acts the apostles used this gift to speak in the different foreign tongues of the nations represented (Acts 2:6,8,11).

God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will? (Hebrews 2:4)

So the apostles provide the correct model for speaking with tongues, not the Corinthian church. The corrective words of Paul in 1Corinthians 14 is addressing a misuse of the gift. Unlike the apostles who spoke in known tongues, some of the Corinthians evidently spoke in *unknown* tongues. And these unknown languages were not being interpreted, resulting in confusion.

Tongues

Note: Some people interpret verses in 1Corinthians 14 to teach that tongues are unknown to the person speaking. On the day of Pentecost, it is true that the Galilean disciples had not learned the languages they were speaking. But that is quite different from the assertion that the apostles did not know what they were saying. For a person to not know what he is saying would mean his mind is not engaged and he is not in control of his own speech. Yet the Christian is to have the mind of Christ at all times. If a person does not know what he is saying, this is not only foolish, but spiritually dangerous (1Cor 12:3). Every believer is to try the spirits to discern whether they are of God (1Jn 4:1). The way a mature believer discerns good from evil is through the cognitive use of the strong meat of the word (Heb 5:13,14). A Christian must therefore always have a discerning mind and know what he or she is saying.

Also, a Christian must never lose self-control. In addressing the confusion at Corinth, Paul states that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1Cor 14:32). In other words, every Christian is to control his own spirit (Prov 25:28). Self-control is not antithetical to Spirit-control. Rather, self-control is how the Spirit operates. It is one of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:23).

When allowing unknown tongues in the church, Paul was not endorsing ecstatic speech unknown to the speaker. He is allowing a foreign language that can be interpreted. An "unknown tongue" is *unknown to others*. That is the thrust of 1Corinthians 14. The person speaking in an unknown tongue can give thanks (1Cor 14: 16,17). He knows what he is saying. He has understanding; it is just not fruitful to the hearers (1Cor 14:14-20). (The word "unknown" is not in the original language but was added by the King James translators to clarify the meaning as conveyed from Greek to English. Although this addition is not necessary for a translation, the context of 1 Corinthians 14 confirms this meaning. Only an *unknown* language needs to be interpreted. No interpreter was needed for the apostles who spoke with different *known* tongues as recorded in Acts 2.)

If there is no interpreter, a person with a tongue unknown to the congregation can speak to himself (1Cor 14:28). This is another indication the person is aware of what he is saying. Someone may say that speaking in the heavenly language unknown to the speaker is communicating to God because God understands the heavenly language. But how can a person speak to himself for self-edification if he does not know what he is saying? Being filled with the Spirit is not speaking to one's self in unintelligible languages; it is speaking to one's self in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord, and letting the word of Christ dwell richly in the mind (Compare Eph 5:18-6:9 with Col 3:16-4:1).

Tongues were never intended to be a mystic, ecstatic, speech that bypasses the mind as the heathen mystery religions practiced. Ecstatic, unintelligible gibberish, which gives an uncertain sound, cannot even be interpreted (1Cor 14:6-9). The real gift of tongues is speaking real languages (Acts 2:1-11).

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, there was no mention of tongues and no mention of mindless, unintelligible utterances. Jesus instructed his followers when they prayed not

Tongues

to use vain repetitions as the heathen (Matt 6:7). Jesus taught his disciples to pray using thoughtful, deliberate language (Matt 6:9-13). Since Jesus commanded his disciples to teach all nations to observe all things He commanded them, Christians today are commanded to pray the way Jesus taught his disciples (Matt 28:19, 20).

7. Not all members of the body of Christ have these gifts (1Cor 12:7-11; 28-31). Scriptures clearly teach that some, but not all, members of the body speak with tongues.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. (1Cor 12:7-10)

Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1Cor 12:30)

Do all speak with tongues? The implied answer is "No". The point is clear that all believers do not speak with tongues. Since all believers do not speak with tongues, tongues cannot be the evidence of Spirit baptism or Spirit filling, since all believers are baptized into the body (1Cor 12:13) and all believers are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). It would also rule out a private prayer language since God desires for all His children to come boldly to the throne of grace with effectual fervent prayer (Heb 4:16; James 5:16).

Note: In spite of 1Cor 12:7-10 and 30, some still insist that all believers are to speak with tongues by referencing 1Cor 14:5 where Paul says "***I would that you all spoke with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesies than he that speaks with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.***" Again, Paul is using hyperbole for emphasis. This is the same language he uses in 1Cor 7:7 when speaking of being single: "***For I would that all men were even as I myself...***" Paul knew well that all did not have the gift to remain single, but in speaking for himself, he is emphasizing the value of singleness. He continues, "***...But every man has his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.***" This is very similar to Paul's statement in 1Cor 14:5 about tongues. Paul is communicating to the Corinthians that he has no personal bias against tongues, for he could wish that they all spoke with tongues, but again emphasizing rather that they would prophesy instead. This statement in no way contradicts his earlier teaching in 1Corinthians that all *do not* speak with tongues.

8. All tongues spoken in the church should be understood by the hearers. 1Corinthians 12 through 14 is written to correct many misunderstandings the Corinthian church had about spiritual gifts and tongues in particular. They had not understood the fundamental purpose of the gift as a sign to unbelievers (1Cor 14:22). They also failed to understand that if tongues were to be useful, they had to convey spiritual truth to the hearers (14:6).

Tongues

Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? (1Cor 14:6)

This is what happened in Acts 2. The apostles spoke in diversities of tongues the wonderful works of God and were understood by those present. There were some at Corinth some 25 years later, on the other hand, who were perverting the gift by speaking in languages that were not understood by those present in the church (14:6-20). This was one of their many misunderstandings that required significant reproof and correction (1Cor 12-14).

Note: If speaking in an unknown tongue is the miraculous ability to spontaneously speak in the heavenly language as the Spirit of God gives utterance, it could never be exercised in a way contrary to God's Spirit? Yet, at Corinth, it is obvious that self-edifying, unknown tongues were causing confusion, of which God was not the author (1Cor 14:33). The "in the spirit" of 1Cor 14:2 is not referring to the Holy Spirit, but the spirit of man (1Cor 2:11; 14:14,16). If it was the Holy Spirit, there would obviously have been no need for the apostle's rebuke.

For this and other reasons, the worship services at Corinth had evidently become confusing, indecent, and disorderly (14:32,33,40). So Paul makes it clear that speaking in tongues is not one of the best gifts if the languages spoken are not understood by others (12:31; 14:1-25, 39). In the church, five words spoken with understanding are better than 10,000 words spoken in an unknown tongue (14:19). Prophesying is to be coveted instead since it is superior to speaking in an unknown language, unless the unknown language is interpreted (14:1-5, 39). Thus speaking in a tongue unknown in the church is not allowed unless it is interpreted (14:28). However, speaking with tongues should not be forbidden if the following scriptural commands are followed (14:39).

- A. The use of tongues should be in accordance with the gift's divine purpose, which is a sign to unbelievers, not believers (1Cor 14:22).
- B. The language (i.e., tongue) spoken should impart understanding to the hearers (1Cor 14:6-20). So if a person speaks in a language unknown to the hearers (i.e., an unknown tongue),
 - B1. The language must be interpreted (1Cor 14:5, 27, 28). If an interpreter is not present, he should keep silent and speak to himself and to God (1Cor 14:28).
 - B2. Let it be by two, or at the most by three, in a service (1Cor 14:27)
 - B3. Only one person at a time (1Cor 14:27)

Note: The fact that someone has a spiritual gift does not guarantee its proper use. It is important that gifts be used in the correct manner. For example, the gift of giving should be exercised with simplicity, ruling with diligence, showing mercy with cheerfulness (Rom 12:4-

Tongues

8). Likewise those who speak with tongues should speak in languages understood by others (as in Acts 2). Those who speak in an unknown language should desire the gift of prophecy instead (1Cor 14:1-5, 23-25). They should also pray to be able to interpret (i.e., pray for the gift of interpretation of tongues)(1Cor 14:13). If no one present can interpret the unknown language, let them keep silence in the church and speak to themselves, and to God (1Cor 14:28). All spiritual gifts, including the gift of different languages, are given for the edification of others and should follow after love and be used decently, in order, and with self control (1Cor 14:1,32,33,40).

9. Tongues can still be active today. Some argue that the gift of tongues was a temporary sign gift given to the infant church and is no longer needed today. The idea is that not all gifts are permanent and that it is the purpose of a spiritual gift that determines its duration. If the gift fulfills its function in one era, it is not necessary for the gift to be continued thereafter. Two or three points are often presented to support the cessation position. Renald Showers presents the cessationist viewpoint as follows:

Cessation point a. 1Cor 13:8-10 says tongues "shall cease" when "that which is perfect is come". "That which is perfect" is viewed to be the complete revelation of God in scripture. Tongues, prophecy, and knowledge in their revelational sense delivered only a partial revelation. When the Bible was completed, there would no longer be a need for the partial revelation that these gifts delivered.

Cessation point b. The apostles were temporary and thus the sign gifts given to the apostles were temporary. The teaching is that the apostles of the Lord were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ and were not replaced after their deaths (Rev 21:14; Acts 1:22; 1Cor 15:8). The apostles were foundational, to be built upon, and not to make up the entire building (Eph 2:20). The apostles of the Lord were given special miraculous signs to confirm the new message of the infant church. These signs were healing all manner of sickness, miracles such as casting out devils, not being hurt by drinking any deadly thing, taking up serpents, and tongues. In Acts 19:12, handkerchiefs or aprons from Paul's body were brought to the sick and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. The apostles even raised the dead, as Jesus had (Acts 9:40; 20:9-12). These miraculous gifts were the hallmark of the apostolic age, an age of transition (Mark 16:17-20; 2Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3,4) Once the apostles were gone, the sign gifts had no further purpose to exist.

Cessation point c. Tongues are for a sign to unbelieving Israel (1Cor 14:22). This belief is based on Paul quoting Isaiah 28:11 in reference to tongues being a sign to unbelievers. Isaiah's pronouncement of judgment was on the nation of Israel. Since the Jews require a sign (1Cor 1:22) and their nation started with signs (Ex 4:2-8), the signs were for them. Tongues particularly were a sign of judgment on that generation of Jews that rejected Christ (Luke 11:51; Mat 24:2). This judgment was executed in 70 AD with the destruction of Jerusalem and the deaths of thousands of Jews. This judgment being thus fulfilled in 70 AD, the sign would have no purpose today.

Tongues

Make note that cessationists do not argue that God cannot, or does not, do miracles, or instantaneous healing. The question is whether certain people have a particular gift to routinely perform miracles and healings as did Christ and His apostles.

Although there is much truth in the cessation arguments, there are significant weaknesses. Here are counterpoints that defeat the cessationist position.

Counter-point a. Does the Bible say tongues will cease when the Bible is completed? 1Cor 13:8 doesn't say tongues *have* ceased. It does say that tongues *will* cease when that which is perfect is come. It doesn't say tongues will cease *when the Bible is completed*. "That which is perfect" appears to be a reference to the second coming of Christ, when we see him "face to face" and "know as we are known" (1Cor 13:8-13). Furthermore it is an assumption that tongues could only be used to convey truth by direct revelation. Tongues could be used to communicate already-revealed truth as contemporary teaching does.

Counter-point b. Were tongues temporary because the apostles were temporary? First of all, were the apostles temporary? The word *apostle* is used in reference to Jesus Christ, God's primary Messenger sent to earth (Heb 3:1). Secondly, there were twelve special apostles of the Lord, plus Paul, who were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (Acts 1:21-26; 2:32; 5:32; Luke 1:1-4; 2Pet 1:16; 1Cor 9:1; 15:1-9; Rev 21:14). These apostles, directly commissioned by the Lord Himself, were given miraculous signs as credentials to corroborate their message (Mark 16:17-20; 2Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3,4). These men were also given the authority to establish doctrine for the church (Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20; 3:5; 2Pet 3:2, 14-16; Jude 3, 17). Thirdly, there may be a wider use of the word apostle. For example, Barnabas is called an apostle in Acts 14:14. Barnabas may have been an eyewitness since over 500 brethren saw the resurrected Lord at one time, but it is not stated in scripture (Acts 4:36; 1Cor 15:6). If the word apostle is used in a general sense as a messenger of the church versus messengers directly commissioned by Jesus Himself, they do not have the authority given to Jesus' eyewitness messengers who laid the doctrinal foundation of the Christian church. Regardless, it can be concluded that the eyewitness apostles of the resurrected Christ were temporary and confined to the early church era.

The second question then is, "Was the gift of tongues given only to the eyewitness apostles of Christ?" If so, the gift could validly be deemed temporary and not active today. Tongues is one of the signs of the apostles displayed in Acts 2. However, in Acts 10:44-46, Gentiles received the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues. In Acts 19:1-6, disciples of John the Baptist trusted in Christ and spoke in tongues. None of these were eyewitness apostles, nor could they even be considered apostles in a general sense. In the three chapters in 1Corinthians dedicated to spiritual gifts and particularly tongues, it is never stated or implied that only apostles are to speak with tongues. As much attention as is given to the gift of tongues, this impactful truth would have no doubt been stated if it was a prerequisite for the gift.

The supposition that 'tongues were temporary because the eyewitness apostles of Christ were temporary' cannot be substantiated scripturally.

Tongues

Counter-point c. Were tongues a sign only to unbelieving Israel? Tongues *were* a sign to unbelieving Israel. The question is, "Were tongues a sign *only* to unbelieving Israel or unbelievers in general?" The Bible does not say tongues are a sign to unbelieving Israel. Paul quotes Isaiah 28, regarding unbelieving Israel, to make the point that tongues are a sign to unbelievers. Paul did not specify the ethnic or religious type of unbeliever in his application of the verse. If tongues were a sign for unbelieving Israel, why didn't the apostle Paul say so in his statement regarding the gift's purpose? All we can know for sure is that tongues are a sign to *unbelievers*. And since unbelievers are still present with us today, it is possible that the gift of tongues could still fulfill its function as a sign today. (Unexpectedly hearing the truth presented in your native tongue could be a sign that either convinces an unbeliever to believe or used as a testimony of judgment.) Furthermore, the gift of tongues is listed among the other permanent gifts in an epistle to the mostly Gentile church of Corinth (1Cor 12:2). If tongues are only for Jews, one might expect it to be mentioned in the more Jewish epistles such as James or Hebrews versus the Corinthian letter.

So as one can observe, the case for the cessation of tongues in the early church period is not clearly stated in scripture nor conclusively proven by principle. The cessationist position does provide a possible explanation for why the miraculous, apostolic-type sign gifts are not observed today. Who throughout church history can be named as having the gift to routinely heal all manner of functional and organic disease instantaneously, or raise the dead, or cast out demons with just a word, or speak foreign languages spontaneously to foreigners? Where is the documented evidence for such amazing events? Why have the most powerful preachers of the past and present not had these accompanying signs? The seeming absence or infrequency of the miraculous, spontaneous, speaking of unlearned foreign languages in church history since the first century, as well as the absence or infrequency of other sign gifts such as healing and miracles, combined with the abundance of counterfeit versions of the gifts, have no doubt bolstered the case for the cessation of tongues.

But experience, or lack thereof, and observation cannot be the basis for doctrine. One of the reasons tongues may not be observed in certain churches or cultures is if there is a common language spoken by all. In such a case, there would be no need for the gift. Prophecy would be sufficient for believers and unbelievers (1Cor 14:24,25). In this case, it is possible that those who have the ability to speak in languages unknown to the audience have done exactly what scripture exhorts--they have coveted to prophesy instead of speaking with tongues. Another reason could be the spiritual deadness in many churches, in which many of the spiritual gifts, not just tongues, are lacking.

There are two primary evidences for the gift of tongues being an active spiritual gift for today.

- The gift of tongues is listed among the other permanent gifts in the epistle to the Corinthians. How else would God tell us a gift is for continued use other than including it in the epistles? Why is it mentioned in only one epistle, one may ask.

Tongues

Spiritual gifts are not listed throughout the Bible. As a matter of fact, most of the gifts cited in the Bible are only mentioned in one place.

- Paul, by the Lord's commandment, allowed the use of tongues in the church even though it appears to not always be the miraculous, spontaneous, speaking as the Spirit gives utterance, as in Acts. He even allowed *unknown* languages to be spoken if the unknown language is interpreted. This speaking in foreign languages unknown to others, although it can be misused, can nonetheless be a spiritual gift that is edifying if the complementary gift of interpretation of languages is used in conjunction with it.

While the miraculous use of spiritual gifts cannot be scripturally ruled out for today, a possible way to acknowledge the extraordinary apostolic display of certain gifts in the early church while acknowledging their continued use in the contemporary church is as follows:

The use of the sign gifts such as tongues were supercharged during the early church by the miraculous power of God to authenticate the message of the eyewitness apostles of Christ. Following this apostolic period, some of these gifts were continued in a less miraculous, yet supernatural, way by God's enablement as with the other spiritual gifts, such as teaching, helps, and giving. Believers gifted to speak foreign languages to communicate the truth of Christ to unbelievers from different nations may indeed have the gift of diversities of tongues. In this way the gift of tongues could still function as a sign to unbelievers. As with all other speaking gifts, tongues would not convey new revelation, but could communicate the truth that has already been revealed in God's completed scriptures.