

DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE
DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
SPIRITUAL GIFTS-PART 7-THE GIFT OF TONGUES
VARIOUS

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I. THE REVIEW OF TONGUES.

This will be enough of a review of the gift of tongues that even those among us who are quite unfamiliar with the controversy that rages in Christendom over this gift will become familiar enough with the subject that this message will be profitable even for them.

A. Its Initiation Of Tongues In The New Testament.

- 1. By way of FIRST MENTION, the gift of tongues was first initiated into the New Testament scheme of things by the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It was in Mark's account of the Great Commission, in *Mark 16:15-17*, that He said, "*Go ye into all the world, and preach t.he gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues*"

Note: If, according to Matthew 7:22, casting out demons can be simulated by those who are lost, is there any reason why we should not think that tongues can not be simulated, as well?

- 2. By way of first use, tongues were an important part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first 120 believers at Pentecost who had tarried as Jesus had commanded them.**

Acts 2:1-4 reads, "*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and begun to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*"

- 3. Though this is by no means the initiation of tongues in the Word of God, it is the initiation of tongues into Christianity and in the New Testament.**

B. The Importance Of Tongues In The New Testament.

Just how important was the gift of tongues during New Testament times?

We think we know very well. As a matter of fact, we think the entire matter is so obvious that we hesitate to examine the Bible, but instead we just assume we know the answer.

But do we really know how important the gift of tongues was? Why don't we just decide right now to allow the Word of God to affect our opinion regarding the importance of the spiritual gift of tongues?

Let's determine the importance of the gift of tongues during the first 35 years of Christianity, or from the time Christ was crucified until the time the apostle Paul was martyred.

There are two ways in which the importance of tongues during this period of time can be ascertained:

- 1. First, we will attempt to determine the importance of tongues by the frequency with which the gift is known to have occurred.**

I think the results of this may surprise some folks.

- a. On the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:4, we know for sure that men and women spoke in tongues at what turned into an outdoor evangelistic service in which 3000 men were saved.**

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However, reading the passage will show that only those who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit could have spoken in tongues, as many as 120 people.

That is one occurrence of tongues at one time in one place.

There is no evidence that any who were saved on that day spoke in tongues. Just the 120.

b. The next occurrence of tongues is recorded in Acts 10:46, some 10 or so years later [Read].

This occurrence, in the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is the second occurrence, at a second time, at a second location.

c. The third Scriptural reference to tongues is found in Acts 19:6 [Read].

This is the third occurrence, at a third time, at a third location.

d. The fourth reference to the gift of tongues is found in First Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14.

This long passage refers to tongues in a fourth location, Corinth, but without any clue as to how many more times tongues was spoken.

Now, don't get me wrong.

I believe that tongues might have quite frequently occurred during this 35 year period of time in early Church history covered by the book of Acts and Paul's first Corinthian letter.

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But the fact that the Holy Spirit records tongues as having occurred only four times in a span of 35 years, and in only two books of the New Testament, makes me wonder if perhaps the importance of tongues back in those days has been somewhat overblown by those in our day and time.

2. Second, we will attempt to determine the importance of tongues during this period of time by examining the priority attached to the gift of tongues.

(1 Corinthians 12 and 14)

a. **12:1** - *"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant."*

This establishes that a Christian can possess a spiritual gift and still know little, if any, of the Biblical truth related to that gift.

b. **12:28** - *"And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."*

Of the gifts listed by Paul, tongues is listed lowest in priority.

c. **14:1** - *"Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy."* The spiritual gift that Paul directs the Corinthians to desire is not the gift of tongues, but prophecy.

Why is that so hard for some 21st century Pentecostals and Charismatics to understand?

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- d. *14:19 - "Yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."*

My, how unimportant tongues is shown to be in comparison to the gift of prophecy.

- e. Looking at this matter from two entirely different viewpoints—the number of times tongues is referred to and the value placed upon tongues by the Apostle Paul—we can clearly see that the gift of tongues was not one of the most important spiritual gifts during the first 35 years of the Church.

C. The Importance Of Tongues In Church History.

Well, throughout the course of Church history the spiritual gift of tongues was not mentioned, not advocated, or not practiced by those looked at as being giants of the faith:

Including, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John and Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, Dwight L. Moody, Albert Finney...the list goes on.

Who would deny that these anointed men of God, spanning a time of some one thousand and four or five hundred years of Church history, were not Spirit-filled men of God? Yet the gift of tongues played no part in their lives or their ministries.

That is a brief review of the gift of tongues.

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II. THE REASON FOR TONGUES.

A. The Reason For Tongues From Biblical Observation.

This is done by observing what happened when tongues were spoken in the Bible and then drawing our own conclusions concerning why tongues was given.

1. Acts 2.

Observations of the gift of tongues and the effects it had on others on the day of Pentecost are quite easy to make, since Luke recorded the events of that day in detail.

- a. The Holy Spirit came, with supernatural signs and evidences, of which the gift of tongues was a part, *verses 2-4*.

The miracles and the signs drew a large crowd of Jewish men who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Jewish feast of Pentecost, an annual observance required by the Law of Moses.

Those Jewish men then heard Simon Peter's anointed message and 3000 of them trusted Christ to the saving of their souls.

- b. **From a careful observation of this occasion one might draw the conclusion that tongues was good for drawing a crowd of Jewish men, which is quite correct. (Acts 2:6)**

2. Acts 10.

The occurrence which took place at the house of Cornelius is more difficult to analyze, since Luke doesn't give us nearly the detail in chapter 10 as he did in chapter 2.

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- a. You should take time to study chapter 10 sometime, but let's read *verses 44-48* now.
- b. If you connect chapter 10 (Luke's record of the actual encounter Peter had with Cornelius) with chapter 11 (which records Peter's testimony to the home crowd in Jerusalem of what happened in the house of Cornelius), another conclusion can be drawn.
- c. Remembering two things, that Peter had Jewish Christians with him when he traveled to the house of Cornelius, and that Jewish Christians initially doubted whether or not Gentiles were eligible for salvation, the fact that Cornelius and those Gentile converts with him spoke in tongues was critical.
- d. It is critical because the Jewish Christians back in Jerusalem knew that tongues was a manifestation of the Holy Spirit and could not legitimately be exercised by an individual unless that individual was indwelt by the Spirit of God, (Who was responsible for giving the gift.)
- e. **So, it might be observed, then, that tongues was an evidence to the Jews that Cornelius, a Gentile, was genuinely saved. (Acts 10:44-48)**

3. Acts 19:1-7.

- a. Paul encountered these men who had been baptized under John the Baptist's ministry.

Paul spoke to them about the difference in the baptisms.

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Afterward, they were baptized in the name of Jesus, received the Holy Ghost, and spoke in tongues and prophesied.

- b. This apparently gave the apostle Paul a wonderful opportunity to go into the synagogue and preach to those who had seen the supernatural events take place, for in verse 8 we read, *"And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months."*
- c. So, we can discern the reason for tongues from Biblical observation.

B. The Reason For Tongues From Biblical Declaration.

In fact, allowing the Word of God to tell us the reason for tongues is a much more reliable way to discover the reason for them than our observations.

1. In 1 Corinthians 14:22, The Apostle Paul Tells Us That Tongues Were Given For A Sign.

"Wherefore tongues are for a sign . . ."

And doesn't this fit in with what our Lord Jesus told His disciples in **Mark 16:17**?

"And these signs shall follow them that believe . . . they shall speak with new tongues."

So, the clear declaration of the Word of God is that TONGUES ARE FOR A SIGN.

2. And the reason it's important that tongues are for a sign is because tongues are for a sign to the Jew only.

A couple of verses to show this:

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- a. *1 Corinthians 1:22*—"For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom."
Now, what are tongues declared to be, wisdom or a sign? A sign. But there's more.
- b. *1 Corinthians 14:21*—"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."

Here Paul refers to *Isaiah 28:11-12*.

The words that Paul quotes are the words of the prophet Isaiah speaking on behalf of the Lord God Jehovah. But to whom did the prophet speak? Two phrases are conclusive.

- 1) The phrase, "*In the law it is written*" must refer to the children of Israel, since *Romans 3.19* teaches us that "*whatsoever things the law saith to them that are under the law.*"

Only the children of Israel were under the law.

- 2). The other phrase is in the middle of the verse. "*This people.*" Who is the "*this people*" Isaiah referred to? The Jews!

So, as Paul explains the purpose of the gift of tongues to the Corinthian Church, he points out that tongues are for a sign, and that signs are for Jews.

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So, even though Christians possessed the gift of tongues, the gift of tongues possessed by Christians was possessed for the benefit of Jews. That is, the gift was given to have an impact on Jewish people.

3. Tongues were not for a sign to all the Jews, but to unbelieving Jews.

1 Corinthians 14:22—"Wherefore, tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

Let's substantiate Paul's declaration with some Old Testament Scripture.

- a. *Deuteronomy 28:45-49* [Read]. Read the entire chapter to get the context, but Moses is telling the Israelites that there will come a time that God will tire of their rebellion and will use a sign to warn them of impending judgment. And what is the sign? Tongues!
- b. *Isaiah 28:11-12* [Read]. This is the precise passage quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:21. Read the entire chapter yourself and you'll see that the prophet warns the people to repent in the face of judgment. And the sign of judgment? They will be spoken to with stammering lips and another tongue!
- c. *Jeremiah 5:15* [Read]. See? Same thing. It has always been God's plan, from the earliest days of dealing with them as a nation, to use tongues as a sign, as a warning if you will, to repent in the face of certain judgment.

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Folks, that's the reason for tongues. To use tongues in any other way and for any other reason doesn't make Biblical sense. Tongues are a sign to unbelieving Jews of the coming judgment of God from which they must be delivered by repenting of their sin.

III. THE RESPONSE TO TONGUES.

Understanding what tongues are for goes a long way toward determining what a person's response is to the gift of tongues.

You see, if you use tongues for what tongues are for you may get a favorable response. But if you use tongues improperly the response will certainly be quite unfavorable. To illustrate this, **let's examine the response to tongues of four different kinds of people.**

A. Group #1–The Earliest Believers.

Remember that the Jews normally had a lifetime of Bible teaching in the synagogues under their belts.

They should have known both the purpose of tongues and the proper response to tongues even before they knew Christ.

We know the 120 first believers used tongues correctly on the day of Pentecost. They were able, with God's help, to draw at least 3000 Jewish men to Simon Peter with the use of their newly acquired spiritual gift.

And if Paul's instructions to the Corinthians are any indication, when tongues were spoken in the house of Cornelius in Acts 10, and when tongues were spoken in Acts chapter 19 by the disciples of John, in all likelihood, unsaved Jewish people were close enough by in both instances that the tongues were spoken in a way that would have substantial impact on them.

So, the response of early Jewish believers to tongues was good, since they apparently used the gift properly and with at least some fruitful results.

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B. Group #2–Unsaved Jewish People.

1. It is quite obvious that the early response to tongues, by Israelites, was good. Three thousand men were saved on Pentecost and many thousands more were saved in the short months that followed. But what was the long term response of the Jewish people to the gift of tongues?
2. Our only reliable source of information on that is the Word of God. **1 Corinthians 14:21** is the verse I read from: *"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."*
3. My friends, the Lord God of Israel Himself, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, predicted that the Jewish people would not respond to tongues properly, that is, with repentance.
4. That means, except for what we saw happened on the day of Pentecost and perhaps just a few other occasions, tongues has been mostly an ineffective tool for evangelizing Jews. But that's what it's for! That means it is a mostly ineffective gift.

C. Group #3–Unsaved Gentiles.

1. Well, if tongues is mostly ineffective for reaching unsaved Jews, perhaps it could be used in a way God did not intend to reach unsaved Gentiles.
2. Some might wish that it were possible. Unfortunately, Scripture is very clear concerning the normal and typical reaction of an unsaved Gentile who hears tongues.

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3. *1 Corinthians 14:23* reads, "If therefore the whole Church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned (that is unlearned in the Old Testament, which can only refer to a Gentile), or unbelievers (that is, unsaved, but having been taught some Old Testament truth, again referring to a Gentile), will they not say that ye are mad?"

4. Notice, if you will, that the typical reaction to be expected from an unsaved Gentile who was rather versed in Old Testament, perhaps having attended a synagogue from time to time, is exactly the same reaction expected from one who was totally ignorant of Scriptural truth . . . negative!

5. Why would Gentiles have a negative reaction? Why would they think those speaking in tongues were stark raving mad? Why shouldn't they?

Tongues was never intended to be used for their benefit in the first place. They should only rarely have had opportunity to hear the gift exercised, and then under controlled circumstances.

6. Is God bound to bless the use of a spiritual gift in a manner God never intended to be used? No.

And folks, don't think the reaction of people nowadays isn't exactly the same as it was then, by and large.

When an unsaved person hears someone supposedly speaking tongues, unless they have been coached into thinking it's a wonderful thing, they do not like it.

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My observation has been that the so-called speaking in tongues initially either makes them afraid or makes them mad.

D. Group # 4--Christians Living Later In The First Century, When Most Believers Were Saved Gentiles.

1. Remember, this is the situation we live in today. The vast majority of believers are come from Gentile backgrounds, with little Bible training before salvation, and having none of the perspective the early Jewish believers had.

2. What kind of response to tongues can be expected from Christians like us? Well, what kind of response did Christians like us have in the later half of the first century? The answer is so obvious that many people look right past it. *1 Corinthians chapters 12, 13 and 14* tell us.

3. That Church, composed almost exclusively of Gentile believers, knew almost nothing about spiritual gifts in general and the gift of tongues specifically.

Had they known Paul would not have needed to instruct them so thoroughly here.

4. It was this tremendous and harmful ignorance, much like the ignorance that exists in the minds of some Christians today, which caused the Corinthians to think that tongues was a gift for self edification rather than a gift for Jewish evangelism.

5. Such ignorance caused then, and causes Christians now, to think that tongues is a very prominent gift, rather than an unimportant gift in a Gentile Christian Church.

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6. It caused then, and causes Christians now, to think that tongues is an enduring gift rather than one which was to have only limited usefulness in history, according to *1 Corinthians 13:8*.
7. So, of the four groups that we've examined, the first Jewish believers, unsaved Jews, unsaved Gentiles, and later on Gentile believers, we could rightly say that only one group responded properly to the gift of tongues, understood where it ought to be placed in God's framework, and was profited by it's use . . . the Jewish believers in the early Church.

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2. **The passages.**
Acts 2:4-11 is very clear. "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, 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. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which Speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?"

Do we need to read on? It is quite clear that on the day of Pentecost tongues was quite simply the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language the speaker had never previously known or learned, but which the Jewish listener heard and understood.

The "other tongues" were foreign languages. The amazing thing for the listeners was that Galileans, not known for their intellect or education, were speaking in languages they could not possibly have learned. Though they did not understand the full implications until Peter preached to them, they did know that this was a work of God.

How about Corinthian tongues? A number of people have maintained that tongues on the day of Pentecost were indeed foreign languages, but Corinthian tongues was a prayer language, to be used to edify yourself and for praying in the Spirit.

Folks, the main thing wrong with that assertion is that it isn't made by Scripture.

IV. THE REALITY OF TONGUES.

What about this thing called the gift of tongues? Is it a heavenly prayer language? Is it foreign languages? Either way, is it for today, or was it given for just a brief period in the past?

A. As To Language.

We will address the question of whether or not the gift of tongues is one which involves the ability to speak in a heavenly worship language or if it involves the ability to speak a foreign language never previously learned. Or was it both?

1. The possibilities.

- a. Of the four occurrences of tongues speaking in the New Testament, only on Pentecost and at Corinth is it possible to examine the nature of tongues and to determine whether tongues was a foreign language capability or a heavenly language capability in each instance.
- b. Some believers hold that in one instance tongues was a foreign language ability but was a heavenly language ability in the other. We will conclusively see whether that assertion is true or false.

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In *1 Corinthians 14:21*, when explaining the gift of tongues to ignorant Corinthians who, themselves, possessed the gift but knew not what they possessed, Paul quoted from *Isaiah 28:11-12*.

But can anyone deny that the stammering lips and unknown tongue to which the prophet Isaiah was referring to was the language of the Assyrians and the language of the Babylonians? No.

If the unknown tongue in *Isaiah 28.11-12* was the Assyrian language or the Babylonian language, a foreign language if you will, then it must be a foreign language to which Paul was referring to in *1 Corinthians 14* and to which Christ was referring to in *Mark 16:17* as well.

3. The problem.

Our minds are so confused by what people say is tongues today, and what people say tongues are for today, that it is very difficult for us to imagine the way the gift operated in a Church service in Paul's day.

Let us remember that tongues were for unsaved Jews, that tongues were not to be spoken by women in Church, according to *1 Corinthians 14:34*, and that tongues is under no circumstances to be spoken unless one who can interpret is present, *1 Corinthians 14:28*.

The problem with tongues nowadays is, it never happens the way God intended. And the reason it can't happen that way, aside from ignorance, is because what passes for tongues today is not a foreign language . . . and it ought to be if it's Biblical tongues.

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B. As To Longevity.

It was the ignorance of the Corinthians which allowed them to think that their precious but misunderstood gift of tongues would last forever.

But in *1 Corinthians 13:8* Paul wrote, "*whether there be tongues, they shall cease . . .*" And the verb translated "*cease*" means to abruptly stop!

But what would cause the gift of tongues to stop? The completion of God's revelation, the Bible? No. Completion of the Bible, which was the coming of that which was perfect, meant the end of prophecy and knowledge, according to *1 Corinthians 13:10*, but not tongues.

What about tongues then? Well, if tongues is a sign to the nation of Israel, which it is, it will remain so long as there was a nation of Israel in rebellion against God.

In the year 70 A.D., with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire, God set the nation of Israel aside, temporarily, because of her sin, to deal with mankind through the institution of the local Church.

When that occurred the need for all of the sign gifts ended. Because when that occurred God suddenly placed Israel on a shelf, where they have been for almost 2000 years.

And being judicially blinded and set aside, according to *Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11*, God now deals with the Jewish people on an individual basis in the same manner as He deals with Gentiles. So, in 70 A.D. tongues ceased because the legitimate need for their use had passed.

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That being the case, what passes for the gift of tongues today simply is not the gift of tongues referred to by Luke in the book of Acts or Paul in First Corinthians.

Today's Tongues are:

1. The wrong thing (not a foreign language)
2. Used by the wrong people (women in Church)
3. On the wrong people (Christians and unsaved Gentiles, instead of unbelieving Jews)
4. At the wrong time (after Israel was set aside by God and dispersed).

The gift of tongues was a sign gift that God gave to the early Church to use in the presence of unbelieving Jews to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy.

“Repent of your sin because judgment is coming.” That was the message that the sign of tongues, a foreign language known by someone who could not possibly know it, communicated.

That is why we do not believe that the gift of tongues are for today.

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It is also likely that the gift of tongues was used by God to provoke the Jews to jealousy. It showed the unbelieving Jewish people who observed it that the Gentile Christians who spoke in tongues were obviously saved by faith in Christ.

The Jews had always thought that God was exclusively theirs. So, God used the Gentile Christians in this way to provoke the Jews, as *Romans 11:11* suggests.

For over thirty-five years believers had been used of God to warn the nation of Israel that judgment was about to fall, but too few listened. In 70 AD judgment did fall in the form of the Roman invasion and annihilation of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish people to the four corners of the globe.

Now, don't make the mistake of thinking that dispersion ended when the modern state of Israel came into existence.

More Jewish people live in the United States than in Israel. The Jewish people remain a dispersed people until after the Rapture.

Another thing to note is the distinction that must be recognized between the nation of Israel and Christians.

We are two separate and distinct groups in God's plan. You see, we Christians are going to be raptured and then God will return Israel to His center stage of attention and begin dealing with her as a people again.

B. Preview Of Future Events.

Some have suggested that God could possibly restore the gift of tongues for use again in the Tribulation. The gift could be mightily used to evangelize Jews around the world. But we are not told in Scripture whether or not that will happen!

V. THE RESTORATION OF TONGUES?

A. Review Past Happenings

So, we see that the gift of tongues was a spiritual gift that was given to the early Church, believers in Jesus Christ who were indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.

The gift was to be used in the presence of unsaved Jewish people to warn them that God was growing weary of their continued rebellion and would soon bring judgment upon their nation . . . unless they turned back to God by trusting His Son, Jesus.

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What we know is that when the rapture occurs, God will send forth 12,000 evangelists from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Since this occurs during the tribulation and during the false peace established by the Antichrist, those 144,000 evangelists will have access to every part of the globe for three and one half years.

How will they communicate with the various peoples of the world? There will be little to no time to learn a language. So, some have suggested the gift of tongues might possibly be used, which they could exercise to make sure unbelieving Jews will listen to them and know that they represent God.

Though it will be a rough time for all, there will be a great harvest of souls for the Lord during those seven years of tribulation. Could God use tongues again? He's God!

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B. Christians Ought To Advocate Unbiased Study.

Many, many people will not study the Word of God in an unbiased way. Instead, they will look for ways to support what they have already made up their mind they are going to believe. Never mind the facts, they just can't believe they might possibly need to learn something.

Additionally, many believers will not approach someone who holds strongly to one position or another.

But, wouldn't you rather talk to someone who is "objective"? An "objective" study of God's Word will invariably lead one to become strong on certain positions!

There's nothing wrong with dogmatism if the dogmatism is the result of study and doesn't interfere with study!

C. Christians Ought To Appeal To God And His Word.

We ought to lend much more weight to what God says than what we think or feel!

D. Finally, Christians Ought To Admit That Spirituality Is Not Related To Emotions Or Feelings . . . Or Even Gifts

The Corinthians thought they were spiritual. They weren't. Many today think they are spiritual when they are not.

What passes for tongues today bears little resemblance to tongues found in the Bible. How can that be? Failure to study the Word of God as we ought to. Allowing others to greatly influence us rather than what God says in His Word!

Spirituality is not related to what gift or gifts we possess. None of us can become more pleasing in God's sight by having a certain gift or gifts.

VI. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS.

In light of the Bible truth presented here today, what kinds of responsibilities ought Christians to face in the world today?

A. Christians Ought To Abandon Preconceived Notions.

Most people who believe in tongues hold to their position because of something someone else told them or something they first saw someone else do. The rest believe in tongues because of something which has happened to them.

On the other hand, most Christians who oppose tongues do so for exactly the same kinds of reasons.

Both positions are wrong for that kind of faulty logic.

We must reach the point in our Christian life when we realize what our preconceived notions are and what the Biblical realities are . . . and abandon the preconceived notions!