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"Tongues" ARE Worth Bothering About!



Written by Jack Hayford

There are few subjects that excite more curiosity, interest, joy, animosity, debate or doctrinaire posturing than “speaking with tongues.” To even address it may raise the question, “Why do you bother with this?” Some feel to avoid “tongues” is safer; fearing they will be thought other than scriptural, sensible, truly practical or even *sane*.

My answer is that on all four of those issues, “bothering” is worth it, because “speaking in tongues”: (1) is scriptural (predicted by Jesus and practiced by the apostolic Church; (2) is sensible (when biblical teaching is observed); (3) is practical (valued in much of today’s Church); and (4) is sane (neither gibberish nor mindless).

Why I bother

My private practice of praying both “with the understanding,” and “with the Spirit also” (I Corinthians 14:15) is rooted in my discovery of their intensely practical benefits. In fact, to my view, it is precisely the value of this exercise that occasions the adversary’s “smoke screening” the subject. He uses debate and dogmatism on both sides of the issue to try to preempt people “bothering,” because he knows how “tongues” can ignite intercession, enrich private prayer and enlarge personal worship.

So, I keep “bothering” (a) by bringing teaching at appropriate times [e.g., see my book, “[The Beauty of Spiritual Language](#)”]; and (b) by mentoring pastors. Other “bothering” occurs, like the time it took to be involved with a denominational group studying how to preserve and present this value in their movement.

Seeking to avoid bigotry

The commitment of these denominational leaders (Pentecostal) impressed me as they evaluated their stance on “speaking with tongues” (especially as it related to a believer’s initial experience of being “filled with” or “baptized in” the Holy Spirit). Their quest to avoid apparent bigotry or dogmatism, while passionately maintaining the value of “speaking with tongues,” evidenced that they feel as strongly as I do about two things:

1. That “speaking with tongues” is a spiritual resource/benefit intended for and available to every born-again believer who will ask for and open to it.
2. That these benefits are so great, every pastor ought to be equipped to teach, inspire and lead in ways that advance a life of “Spirit-fullness” that includes an ongoing exercise of these Spirit-given languages.

Of great concern with the group was over any doctrinal statement regarding “speaking with tongues” that may employ verbal formulas that, however unintentionally (a) feed rather than clarify confusion and debate; (b) sidetrack from the benefits of “tongues”; and (c) have evolved to new substitutes

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and debate; (b) sidetrack focus on the benefits of tongues ; and (c) have evolved to now substitute church dogma for biblical terminology.

What I liked best about working with these leaders was the absence of any attitude of “copping out.” No one was seeking an escape from the stigma of being “speakers with tongues,” but rather they wanted to advance the values and the biblical intention for this experience. But they know they are vulnerable to being misunderstood by any Pentecostals/Charismatics who would see any reevaluation of their own doctrinal statements as heretical (especially in the wording of speaking in tongues as “the initial physical evidence of a believer’s “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”).

The irony here is that even with their history and existing statements of faith, many Pentecostal and Charismatic churches already “back down” on the issue. This is not always due to an embarrassment over the subject, but because many leaders lack practical training for teaching/leading people to an understanding and experience in the practical benefit of “speaking with tongues.”

Yet the bottom line is that those who fear a recast doctrinal statement would erode convictions in their group labor with a moot point. So often, the majority of their own people aren’t practicing their doctrine anyway! So critics have no just footing for berating these “convinced and practicing” leaders who are seeking a means to clarify Bible terminology and focus on the values and pursuit of “speaking with tongues” for their biblical benefits. Not only is their no risk in such reevaluation, there is much to be gained.

My own pastoral practice

For **ALL** the years of my ministry, I have practiced, taught, and led people to expect to “speak with tongues” when they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. But beginning 30 years ago, I found immeasurable gains in the results of my teaching when I started focusing on “tongues” as a “benefit available” as believers open to Jesus, the Baptizer with the Spirit. I found people ceased feeling saddled with the burden of manifesting tongues “as a proof,” as they warmed to God’s Word and sought Jesus—seeking HIM for “all the fullness” of blessing He offers. Thus, the focus moves from “tongues” to worship; from doctrinal requirements to practical benefits. (I do note how this attending benefit continued in the Church. See Acts 10:44-48; 19:1-6.)

The result has been that eight-five to ninety percent of our members receive these truths, open to Jesus the Baptizer, are “filled with the Holy Spirit” and also “speak with tongues.” This fruit has abounded, even though our doctrinal statement does not have an “initial physical evidence” clause; instead reading that, when receiving the Baptism with (or fullness of) the Holy Spirit, “the believer may have every reason to expect His incoming to be after the same manner... as in Bible days...the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15).

We passionately minister in a way that people not only desire to be “filled with the Holy Spirit,” but with unsurprising consistency receive the beauty of spiritual language for their prayer, worship and intercessory life. This approach has also removed the liability of our appearing to invalidate the spiritual status of Christians who do not speak with tongues. God has blessed with fruitfulness this movement from “demanding a sign,” to “teaching a value;” yet virtually all to whom we minister do willingly open to and do “speak with tongues.”

I offered a brief for use in the discussion of those inviting my participation. It summarizes biblical/theological issues--“doctrine” that issues in practical pursuits. We have verified that such an approach isn’t “backing down” nor does it “reduce” anything, for we’ve seen tens of thousands (a) open to Jesus’ command to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21), and (b) also receive the Spirit’s enabling with supernatural languages.

So, again, I have “bothered”—but for a reason. I deeply believe the Holy Spirit is seeking to bring broadened understanding today, with an approach that will help even more to open fully to this aspect of believing life. Seeing Paul’s affirmation, “I thank God I speak with tongues more than all of you,” would seem reason enough for all to lay aside doubt and hesitancy—and for every leader to live, teach and encourage this practice (I Corinthians 14:18).

At its very beginning, the whole Church received this resourcing: “They were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit AND began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” I don’t think God was thereby obligating us to repeating a “proof,” but that He was presenting us with an abiding benefit... all of us. As you review what I offered that committee, I would welcome knowing what you think. That is, if it seems worth “bothering.”

Text of the “brief”

Regarding “The Baptism With The Holy Spirit,”

WE HOLD ...

...THAT Jesus’ multi-faceted ministry notably features His role as the One who “Baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33), and that this is revealed as a distinct and separate ministry from His role as “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29);

THUS, we distinctly minister Christ as both—our Savior from sin, and as our Baptizer with the Holy Spirit.

...THAT being filled with (or baptized in) the Holy Spirit is an experience distinct and separate from a person’s regeneration; and while one’s new birth and baptism in the Holy Spirit may chronologically occur in immediate proximity, these experiences are neither simultaneous or synonymous (Acts 9:17; 10:44-48).

THUS, we receive the promise of the “seal of the Holy Spirit” as offered after we believe (Eph. 1:13), and do not see new birth and the baptism with the Holy Spirit as one and the same.

...THAT the Day of Pentecost ushered in the timeless “promise of the Father” Jesus prophesied, saying they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5); that the continuing purpose of this baptism is to provide spiritual power for living, serving and bearing witness to Christ; and that this baptism is accompanied by supernatural signs—an expectation that continued in the early Church as confirmation of Holy Spirit’s fullness, presence and power (Acts 10:46; 11:15-18).

THUS, we are unswerving in our passion for pursuing this experience to which Christ calls and commands us to receive, that we might be enabled to minister His life, truth and power to our world; and we are unequivocal in our expectation of the Holy Spirit’s manifestation of signs “as at the beginning.”

...THAT since the NT text commonly links believer’s speaking with tongues to their being “filled with” or “receiving” the Holy Spirit, we expect this facet of the experience as (a) a worthy expression of praise to God (Acts 2:11); (b) fulfilling one of the signs Jesus said would characterize believers (Mark 16:15-19); (c) timelessly available (Acts 2:4; 10:44-48; 19:1-6); and as (d) continually nurturing and practical (I Corinthians 14:3; Jude 20).

THUS, we urge every believer to receive the blessing of speaking with tongues that the multiple benefits of this Holy Spirit-enabled resource may edify their daily life; thereby prayerfully drawing on the Spirit’s power that Jesus’ promised “rivers of living water” may continually flow out of a life filled with, praying in, serving by and witnessing with supernatural ability (John 7:37-39).

...THAT the NT clearly distinguishes between (a) the “gift of tongues” as a public exercise not granted to all believers (12:10, 30) and always to be accompanied by an interpretation (I Corinthians 14:5, 26-33); and (b) the benefits of speaking with tongues “to God” (I Corinthians 14:2), enabling prayer, praise and worship (I Corinthians 14:14-18) as well as spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:18-20) and self-edification (Jude 20).

THUS, we do not confuse the public gift and the private exercise of the spiritual language, maintaining

THUS, we do not confuse the public gift and the private exercise of the spiritual language, maintaining liberty with order regarding “tongues” in our congregational life, and constancy with fervor regarding “tongues” in our devotional life.

...THAT the actions of the apostles reveal the early Church’s priority for seeing believers initiated in Holy Spirit fullness (His being “received” or “coming upon them”); that converts not yet having received were taught and ministered to in ways that assisted each one to desire and receive this experience (Acts 8:14-19; 19:1-6).

THUS, we place great importance on teaching and leading believers to seek Jesus for their own experience of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and to desire, expect and welcome His incoming “as at the beginning.”

...THAT the truth and passion seen in God’s Word is the source of our zeal in urging every believer, when they seek Jesus as the “Baptizer with the Holy Spirit,” to open to “speaking with tongues as the Spirit gives utterance” (Acts 2:4); not as a requirement to verify one’s experience or spiritual worth, but as a biblical expectation for each of us—a grace intended as an abiding part of our daily walk in the life and power of the Spirit.

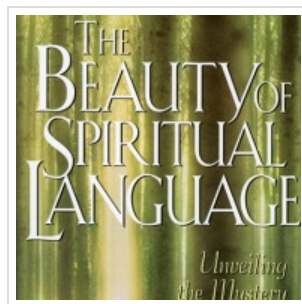
THUS, we are not passive over ministering the fullness of the Holy Spirit or in teaching the desirability of speaking with tongues—a priority but not a pursuit requiring “tongues” as a proof, but as a dimension provided for every believer as a daily resource in Christ (I Corinthians 14:18).

AND THUS WE CONCLUDE...

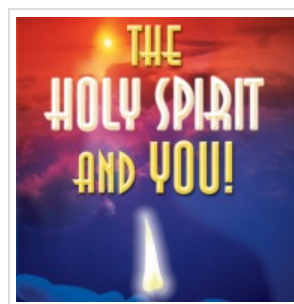
That our quest and our expectation regarding teaching and leading believers into the fullness of the Holy Spirit is rooted in God’s Word: (1) as we call every believer to “receive the promise of the Father,” and be “baptized in the Holy Spirit”; and (2) as we invite all who are filled with the Spirit to freely expect to speak with tongues, teaching that what is initiated “as at the beginning” is not experienced as a climax, but received as a commencement—intended to begin a “walk in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16, 25); and to launch a pathway of continually being “filled with the Holy Spirit...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18-20).

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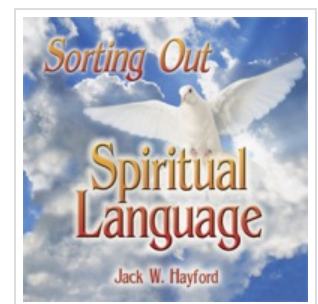
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