

Tongues, Prophecy, & Slaying in the Spirit

Tongues in the Epistles

What exactly is the gift of tongues and how should it be practiced? Here is a summary of what the Epistles teach about the gift of tongues. .

Definition: A *self-edifying* (1 Cor. 14:4); non-cognitive (1 Cor. 14:2b,14); *LANGUAGE that aids prayer* (1 Cor. 14:2a).

- Real language

Paul associates tongues with speaking and says that men and angels have different tongues (1 Cor. 13:1). Recall Acts 2:6: When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

- Given to some, not all

(1 Cor. 12:30) All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?

This is not an experience all Christians should have at least once, as Restorationists often claim. Nor is the ability to speak in tongues required proof of being “Spirit filled.”

- Primarily used in private

See 1 Cor. 14:18,19. Tongues can be used in meetings if it they are interpreted (14:27).

Paul lays down several **restrictions for tongues in a corporate setting** so that edification of others remains the primary focus (vs 12,26b, and in context, 12:7,25,26). Paul was not advocating its corporate use, but rather regulating it (1 Cor. 14:20-40):

- Exercise care when non-Christians or new Christians are present (1 Cor. 14:16,23).
- Only a few (2 or 3) may speak in tongues (v. 27). I.E. - it should not be center-stage of corporate meetings.
- They must speak in an orderly way, taking turns. NOT all speaking together, interrupting one another (v. 27).
- All public tongues must be interpreted (vs 27b,28).

Paul tells them *not to forbid it* (v. 39) but certainly *regulates* it (above).

In Xenos, a fair number of people speak in tongues. Most do this in private and report that it helps them express themselves to God, refreshes them, and motivates them for ministry and sanctification. The proper corporate setting for tongues would be in a home group, study group, or prayer group—following Paul's restrictions.

Why aren't our home group meetings just like what Paul describes in 1 Cor. 14:26?

- *Paul does not prescribe this. He describes* what was going on in Corinth—and then moves into heavily critiquing and regulating it so that it can be edifying.
- The principle of group participation is valid, and we should make room and extend freedom for this (sharing, group prayer, etc.) as long as it's practiced as Paul prescribes. We don't want to be guilty of "quenching" the Holy Spirit.

“Prophecy”

In the book of Acts, the word prophet is most often used to refer to an Old Testament prophet. But there are a few examples of prophets who ministered in the early church. Philip the evangelist “had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” (Acts 21:9). Agabus is also called a prophet. He correctly predicted that the Jews would deliver Paul over to the Romans when he reached Jerusalem (Acts 21:10-14).

Definition: Prophets receive and relay God's message to his people.

Old Testament prophets are known for predicting the future, (FORETELLING) but they also called the Jews to repent and turn back to God (FORTHTELLING). Sometimes they expounded on existing doctrine and called for a response; sometimes they introduced new revelation. Once in a while, they demonstrated SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE—knowing information about someone that God revealed to them (e.g. Daniel’s knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream).

In the New Testament, people who regularly exercise the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10) are known as prophets. In one case we know of, a New Testament prophet predicted the future (Agabus in Acts 21), but usually prophets spoke to edify and instruct people in their house church (1 Cor. 14:3,4,31).

The chart below summarizes the role of Old and New Testament prophets:

| | Old Covenant | New Covenant |
|---|---|---|
| Forth-telling (new doctrine) | Yes | Yes , but stopped with the Apostles. |
| Forth-telling (applying existing doctrine) | Yes | Yes (1 Cor. 14:3,4,31; Acts 15:32) |
| Fore-telling | Yes | Yes (Acts 11:28) |
| Special knowledge | Yes – Daniel with Nebuchadnezzar | No clear examples described or teaching prescribed on this. |

Unlike OT prophets, under the New Covenant, prophets do not write new revelation from God. They primarily apply the written Word (see “instruct” in 14:31) both individually and corporately (see Packer, *Keep In Step With The Spirit*, pp. 214-

217). We do have prophecy, and we exercise it often (e.g. a good sharing in home church)! We just don't make a big deal of it.

Examples: Preaching, extemporaneous sharing; Francis Schaeffer-like application of the Word to the church today; shared burdens; interpreted tongues (1 Cor. 14:5,6).

Guidelines

- *The content must be evaluated by other Christians* (1 Cor. 14:29): predictions and sharings should be evaluated for accuracy and fidelity against apostolic doctrine (see 1 John 4:1-6. Note that the "we" in verse 6 refers to the Apostles). Third Wave churches often encourage "experimentation," not judging false predictions, and not exposing or reproving inaccurate predictions.
- *We should not rely on these predictions for personal guidance at the exclusion of other key decision-making principles.* See week 3 of module 2 of Christian Ministry 3 for more on this. Paul in Acts 21 is a good example of applying other key principles to his decision making.

“Slaying in the Spirit”

Definition: This is said to be an intense encounter with God through the agency of another Christian.

Phenomena: Falling back, fainting, uncontrollable laughter/ sobbing; animal noises; paroxysms.

Claimed Results: Results vary and can include inner healing; spiritual renewal; physical healing; demonic deliverance; hearing a call from God.

Description in Acts and the rest of the Bible: There are several instances in Acts and the rest of the Bible where people fall down. But none that we're aware of match the description of slain in the Spirit given above.

Acts 5:5 Ananias falls down dead.

Acts 9:4 Paul falls down before Jesus on the road to Damascus.

Acts 16:29,30 The Philippian Jailor falls down before Paul and Silas and asks how to be saved.

Acts 20:9 Eutychus falls down from a three story window and dies.

In Paul's case, there was no human mediator. No one was laying hands on either Paul or the jailor, as is often the case in the Restorationist practice.

Daniel 8:16-18 Daniel falls to his face frightened before an angel.

Matthew 17:6 When Jesus is transformed before Peter, James, and John they “fell on their faces much afraid.”

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 A guest enters a house church and falls down on his face to worship God.

Revelation 1:17 John falls before Jesus like a dead man.

Revelation 22:8-9 John falls down to worship an angel.

These scriptural examples of Christians fainting or being paralyzed pertain to direct encounters with God, angels, or the risen Christ -- *not* through human mediators. None of the practices associated with being slain in the Spirit (falling backwards, barking, laughing, shaking, sobbing, healing) are mentioned. If they were seeking God, it was for his guidance, not an experience. And their response is falling down prostrate (in a posture of worship) and fearing God.

None of these episodes involve laying hands on anyone, which often facilitates slaying in the Spirit. In scripture, the laying on of hands was used for healing or commissioning people into ministry.

The truth is, there simply are no biblical examples of anyone being slain in the Spirit!

Meetings:

Meetings where this practice occurs often contain suggestion, group pressure, manipulation, etc. (see below).

Does it bring inner healing?

The claim that this experience brings inner healing or spiritual renewal is suspicious at best. This isn't described as ever happening in the epistles, let alone prescribed and/or emphasized. How can it be considered important?

John Stott's reply to: "What do you make of the Toronto Blessing?"

(John Stott) "I never want to criticize anything which people claim has been a blessing to them in terms of a greater awareness of the reality of God, or a profounder joy, or an overwhelming love for God and for others, or a fresh zeal in evangelism. It's not for me to doubt any of these things. My major questions concern three areas. First, it is a self-consciously anti-intellectual movement. I listened on tape to the first person who brought the Toronto Blessing to Britain. This person said: "Don't analyze, don't ask questions. Simply receive." I think that is both foolish and dangerous. We must never forget that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Secondly, I cannot possibly come to terms with those animal noises, and it grieves me very much that-- as far as I know--no charismatic leaders have publicly disassociated themselves from them, as they should. The whole Bible tells us that we are different from the animal creation; it rebukes us when we behave like animals and calls us to be distinct. Nebuchadnezzar's animal behavior was under the judgment, not the blessing, of God. My third problem concerns all the falling. Even charismatic leaders have pointed this out, that on the few occasions in the Bible when people have fallen over, they have all fallen forward on their faces, and they have all done so *after* they have been granted a vision of the majesty, holiness, and glory of God. In the Toronto experience, however, people fall backwards without any previous vision of God. Those three things trouble me."¹

¹ John Stott, "Basic Stott," by Roy McCloughry of *Christianity Today*; Jan 8, 1996; p. 32.