

## What Is the Meaning of Tongues?

### Introduction:

- 1) What does it SAY?
  - a) The word *tongue* (*glossa*) is used 163x in the Greek OT (LXX), with the same three aspects as the NT.
  - b) The word *tongue* (*glossa*) is used @ 50x in the NT with three primary aspects.
    - i) Refers to the physical tongue, the organ of speech and taste:
      - (1) Gospels: Mark 7:33, 35; Lk. 1:64; 16:24
      - (2) Acts: 2:3
      - (3) Epistles: James 1:26; 3:5, 6, 8; Rev. 16:10
    - ii) Refers to regular verbal communication:
      - (1) Acts: 2:26
      - (2) Epistles: Rom. 3:13; 14:11; 1 Cor. 14:9; Phil. 2:11; 1 Pet. 3:10; 1 John 3:18
    - iii) Refers to a known common language:
      - (1) Gospels: Mark 16:17
      - (2) Acts: 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6
      - (3) Epistles: 1 Cor. 12:10 (2x), 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4, 5 (2x), 6, 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39; Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15
  - c) A related word is *language* (*dialektos*), which is found 6x in the NT.
    - i) Refers to a known common language:
      - (1) Acts 1:19; 2:6, 8; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14
- 2) What does it MEAN?
  - a) Most people understand the first two aspects without any problem.
  - b) Some people misunderstand the third aspect.
    - i) Some argue that *glossa* refers to both a known common language and to strange, ecstatic speech (gibberish).
      - (1) This is the position of the relatively new position of continuationism or Pentecostalism and some within the New Calvinism.
        - (a) This view has attempted to gain credibility in the last 100 years.
        - (2) This divides Christianity into at least two groups: the haves and the have-nots.
        - (3) This undermines the doctrine of the finality, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture because it argues that “something more” is necessary.
      - ii) Others argue that *glossa* refers only to a known common language.
        - (1) This view has been the orthodox position since NT times.
- 3) How does it APPLY?
  - a) The first two aspects are not a source of contention among Christians today.
  - b) The third aspect is a source of contention among Christians today.

- i) Does the normal use of the third aspect of *glossa* fit comfortably in the context of each passage?
  - (1) This would argue against the gibberish-continuationism position.
- ii) Do we have any sound theological reason to reject the long-standing historical interpretation of the third aspect of *glossa*?
  - (1) This would argue against the gibberish-continuationism position.
  - (2) We at Calvary stand comfortably within the cessationism camp
- c) First Corinthians 13:8 tells us that tongues will cease or “stop by themselves.” (The verb form is a future middle indicative.)
  - i) Chrysostom (died 407 AD) said that miraculous spiritual gifts (including tongues) had ceased by his time.
    - (1) This whole place is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place. (*Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* (Homily 29, vol. 12, p. 168.))
  - ii) During the next 1,800 years, only a small number of instances are recorded of any “speaking in tongues”. These consistently were something other than known languages.
  - iii) It was not until the Azusa Street Mission in 1906 that the modern charismatic-Pentecostal movement began.
    - (1) Some would argue that it goes back slightly further to Charles Parham in Topeka, KS, in 1900.
- d) One resource (among many) that may be helpful for you is *Charismatic Chaos* by John MacArthur.