



True Jesus Church

# Speaking in Tongues



*"Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:3-4).*

INQUIRY SERIES

# Speaking in Tongues

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## About This Booklet

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Tongue-speaking in the Christian community raises many questions and comments.

The Bible tells us that when people first heard the disciples of Jesus speaking in tongues, they asked one another, “Whatever could this mean” (Acts 2:12)?

Some said this of the disciples, “They are full of wine” (Acts 2:13).

Today, two thousand years later, questions are still being asked and comments are still being made.

In this booklet, the True Jesus Church shares a biblical perspective on the matter of speaking in tongues. We pray that you will be edified as you study the Scripture along with us. May the Lord our God himself guide you with his wisdom so that you may understand the blessing he has in store for you.

# 1

## General Concept

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Speaking in tongues has two different functions. The first and primary function of tongue-speaking during prayer proves that one has the Holy Spirit. This function is self-edifying—that is to say, it solely benefits the speaker. The second function is the delivery of a message from God to a congregation. It edifies the listeners.

The first manifestation is crucial, and in fact, it must occur in determining if a person has received the Holy Spirit. The second manifestation edifies the church, and occurs as God wills.

### Examining Alternative Concepts

A common belief is that a person receives the Holy Spirit when he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. This belief is based on 1 Corinthians 12:3, which reads, “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”

While this verse teaches that a person’s confession of Jesus as Lord is due to the work of the Holy Spirit, it does not say that anyone who acknowledges Jesus as Lord has received the Holy Spirit. A person who has not received the Holy Spirit may also be moved by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Christ as Lord. There is a distinction between being moved by the Holy Spirit and receiving the promised Holy Spirit.

We now consider a striking counter-example. Read carefully Acts 8:5–19. The facts of this case are outlined by highlighting the following verses:

- v. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to the people.
- v.8 So there was much joy in that city.
- v.12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
- v.14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John.
- v.15 ...who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit;
- v.16 ...for [the Holy Spirit] had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We have here a group of people who have believed in Jesus and have committed themselves in baptism. We can safely assume that they have accepted Christ. It is clear too that these people have not received the Holy Spirit.

A second counter-example can be found in the incident where Paul encountered a few disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:1–7). Paul asked, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” This exchange poses another serious challenge to the concept that accepting Christ equals receiving the Holy Spirit. There was no need for Paul to question the members in Ephesus if they had received the Holy Spirit immediately upon accepting Christ. One may, however, argue that these disciples were not well acquainted with Jesus at all and so may not have accepted Him correctly. But, we read further and discover that as in the Samaritan incident, these disciples received the Holy Spirit only *after* conversion, baptism and the laying of hands by the apostles. Since accepting Christ is believed to precede water baptism, in this incident too, accepting Christ precedes receiving the Holy Spirit by a conceivable time span.

Two counter-examples present a firm conclusion: receiving the Holy Spirit does not necessarily occur when one accepts Christ.

We move on to examine another popular belief. Some believe that God must be at work in a person who has a good Christian character, or whose nature has been transformed from evil to good. They therefore deduce that such a person must have received the Holy Spirit. In particular, if he exhibits virtues akin to the fruit of the Spirit, then he must surely have the Holy Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22, 23).

Let us return to the Samaritan incident in Acts 8:5–19 for illustration. Verse 8 records that there was much joy in the city. Joy issues from the fruit of the Spirit. According to the above concept, the Samaritans must have received the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the apostles received definite news that they had not received the Holy Spirit! It wasn't until Peter and John came to Samaria, prayed for them, and laid hands on them, that these new converts received the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, when the Holy Spirit finally descended on the Samaritans, a third party including the ex-sorcerer Simon, immediately witnessed that they had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17–19).

The point to be made here is that good character and virtues associated with the Holy Spirit are uncertain pointers as to whether or not one has the Holy Spirit. Also, this was not the criterion by which the apostles ascertained as to whether the Holy Spirit was given or not. We shall shortly explain what this criterion is.

At this juncture, the belief that virtues associated with the fruit of the Spirit are the definite criteria for determining the presence of the Spirit in a person has to be rejected.

### Questions Raised

The rejection of some alternative concepts proposed earlier gives rise to two important questions.

- 1) If one does not receive the Holy Spirit when one accepts Christ, then when does one receive it?

- 2) If good Christian character does not necessarily mean that one has received the Holy Spirit, then what is a true indication?

Receiving the Holy Spirit can occur any time after a person believes in Christ. Prior to his baptism, Cornelius the centurion received the Holy Spirit when he was listening to Peter's sermon (Acts 10:44–48). Most of the other incidents in Acts record believers receiving the Holy Spirit at various times after water baptism. For example, the Samaritans were baptized before Peter and John helped them receive the Holy Spirit. The Ephesian disciples received the Holy Spirit a short while after their baptism.

Since receiving the Holy Spirit does not occur at a fixed time or during any fixed sacraments, a Christian in search of the Truth will inevitably ask, "How do I know if I have received the Holy Spirit or not?"

We examined earlier how using spiritual virtues as an indicator is inadequate. A good feeling or an emotional uplift is no sure guide either. Firstly, these can result from one's own doing and secondly, the apostles did not base their observations on such factors.

Instead we are told regarding Cornelius' conversion that "the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God" (Acts 10:45–46). Speaking in tongues is clearly one evidence that a person has received the Holy Spirit. Read also Acts 2:1–4 and 19:1–7. This manifestation is extraordinary and highly visible, a remarkable sign of God's most precious gift in the New Testament. It convinces both the recipients and the observers that something spiritual has happened. It is a novel sign given by God accompanying His gift of Himself.

We can now proceed further to say that without any other definite sign, speaking in tongues is the evidence by which one ascertains he has received the Holy Spirit. A Christian must ask to receive the Holy Spirit as a separate

request, and perhaps over an extended period of time. This falls in line with Jesus' teaching that one must earnestly pray for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:5–13). When he receives the Holy Spirit, he will be able to speak in tongues.

# 2

## Do All Speak with Tongues?

A new question arises. If speaking in tongues is the sole criterion and evidence that one has received the Holy Spirit, then it must necessarily follow that all should speak with tongues. However, this seems an obvious contradiction to Paul's rhetorical question: "Do all speak with tongues?" (1 Corinthians 12:30). A careful examination of the context in which the question was raised is needed here, as this will lead to the understanding that there are two functions of tongue-speaking. The listing of spiritual gifts serves to explain the diversities of gifts and roles different members receive. Hence, no single gift is shared by all. The other qualification is that these gifts must be "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7).

Is tongue-speaking for the common good? Paul says no, for "he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Corinthians 14:4). But tongue-speaking can be for the common good in some situations: "If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret" (1 Corinthians 14:27; cf. 14:5).

Speaking in a tongue *with* interpretation communicates messages from God for the common good, and is thus one of the diverse gifts of the Spirit given separately to different believers. Such tongues are not spoken by all, and this is the answer to Paul's question.

Speaking in a tongue without interpretation is "speaking to himself and to God" (1 Corinthians 14:28). In this case the people need not be limited in number to two, or three,

or speak in turn. For on the day of Pentecost, one hundred and twenty people spoke at one time. And in Ephesus, about twelve people spoke during one instance. Such tongues are spoken during prayer by all who have received God's Spirit, as we have already examined. This is the main purpose of tongue-speaking: "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:2).

# 3

## Tongues-Speaking in the True Jesus Church

The emphasis placed on tongue-speaking in the True Jesus Church is linked directly to the importance of receiving the promised Holy Spirit. This is unlike the surge of interest in spiritual gifts (*charismata*) of the Holy Spirit among the Charismatics. Members of the True Jesus Church seek the gift of the Holy Spirit; the term “gift” (*dorea*) here is epexegetical, being the Holy Spirit Himself.

Also, we do not reckon that speaking in tongues signifies a baptism in the Holy Spirit that is separate from receiving the Holy Spirit. The two go hand in hand. Speaking in tongues then, does not make one a superlative Christian, but is fundamental to every Christian, proving that he belongs to Christ (Romans 8:9).

The ability to speak in tongues remains with a person after he receives the indwelling Holy Spirit. Each time a Christian or a congregation of believers prays in the Spirit, this ability is made possible by the Holy Spirit. Since this phenomenon of congregational tongue-speaking has been criticized as unscriptural, we shall discuss it in light of the Scriptures.

Many have frowned upon the public display of tongue-speaking for the following reasons:

- 1) No one understands, not even the speaker himself.

“For no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit” (1 Corinthians 14:2).

“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Corinthians 14:14).

- 2) Paul limited the number of speakers, even when there is interpretation.

“If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret” (1 Corinthians 14:27).

- 3) Unbelievers may mistake it for madness.

“If, therefore, the whole church assembles and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad?” (1 Corinthians 14:23).

The fact that tongues are unknown languages should not inhibit our prayers, for “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). Moreover, Paul himself remedies the situation he poses: “What am I to do? I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the mind also” (1 Corinthians 14:15). We can participate with our minds when we pray in the Spirit.

The Scriptures show that tongues bestowed upon believers when they receive the Holy Spirit are not spoken by two or three in turn. The praying saints on the day of Pentecost numbered about one hundred and twenty. The Ephesian disciples numbered about twelve. We see, then, that when tongues are not specifically directed at any human audience, as in prayer, no restriction in number applies.

From the above, we also come to realize that whenever Paul instructs the Corinthian believers to curb the speaking of tongues, he refers to another function, that is, the preaching in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:19, 28).

Unbelievers will think that we are mad if we speak to one another in tongues. When the entire congregation prays to God in tongues in an orderly manner, however, it becomes a sign to the unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22).

Inevitably, there will be those who will not benefit from this sign, such as the mockers on the day of Pentecost who remarked, “They are filled with new wine” (Acts 2:13). Nevertheless, the sign of tongues coupled with Peter’s sermon converted three thousand souls on that day.

# 4

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## Conclusion

In regard to tongue-speaking, the standpoint of the True Jesus Church is not merely one of those open-ended theological view-points which are peripheral to the cardinal tenets of Christianity. Rather, in the Bible, believers ascertained whether people had received the Holy Spirit or not on the evidence of tongues. Accordingly, the newly converted, baptized Samaritans were deemed to be without the Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our salvation (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13), every Christian ought to reassess his and her position according to biblical principles, and to give an honest response to Paul’s question: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2)



## 5

## Personal Testimonies

Jesus told His disciples that His believers would be able to speak in new tongues (Mark 16:17). Even though man cannot understand these tongues, they are a way of communicating with God. For when we pray in tongues, we speak to God and not to men (1 Corinthians 14:2). Wouldn't you like to experience the joy of receiving the Holy Spirit and the speaking of tongues in the True Jesus Church?

Below are a few personal testimonies of receiving the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues:

### 1. “For Everyone Who Asks Receives...” —by Heny of Banjarmasin, Indonesia

In 1984, my family and I were baptized in the True Jesus Church. I was a teenager then. I did not understand the importance of religious education. I was not keen to go to church. As a result I did not know the teachings of Christianity. Believers used to visit me. After each visit, I would attend a service or two, but would stop after that.

When I was in my first year at college, I started to seek for God. I learned that I needed to receive the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of my salvation. But I did not know how to pray for the Holy Spirit. I became worried. A friend I spoke to invited me to attend a charismatic church. I went. Much to my delight the talk was on how to pray for the Spirit. The speaker said that the Holy Spirit would fill me if I prayed with my hands raised and face lifted, saying “Hallelujah.” When the pastor laid hands on me, I fell backwards. But I felt no Holy Spirit filling me. I stood up and felt a little ashamed. I watched the others praying.

There was a boy who fell backwards onto the floor. He was shouting in agony and was foaming at the mouth. I went home utterly confused.

I related the incident to a religious education teacher in the True Jesus Church. When I heard his explanation, I felt ashamed before God and our brethren. So great were my feelings of guilt and shame that I cried instantaneously. I went home and prayed, asking for the forgiveness of God.

The following morning, I felt my guilt and shame lifted. I thanked God for answering my prayer, and for His reassurance of His love. God is indeed merciful and ever ready to forgive.

In 1988, I attended a students' spiritual meeting at the True Jesus Church in Jakarta, Indonesia. On one of the nights, I had a dream. In the dream, I was praying in a field. Suddenly, a strong gust of wind blew, accompanied by a loud sound. I swayed slightly but remained upright. Due to the strength of the wind, my body and tongue vibrated. I had the same dream twice. It was strange. The following morning, I went to church with the confidence that I would surely receive the Holy Spirit. I prayed with faith and great fervor. When I uttered “Hallelujah,” my body and tongue suddenly started vibrating. I could neither control my tongue nor understand the words uttered. I was crying out of tremendous joy, for the Lord had answered my prayer.

I am convinced that the Lord Jesus truly loves His children. We must believe that our prayers will be heard by God and ought to persevere in our prayers. Our God is indeed a living God!

(extracted from Manna issue 23, 1994, p. 41)

### 2. The Calling of God—by Constance Lin of Los Angeles, USA

Hallelujah! I thank God for His immense grace that enables me to relate my personal testimony of how Jesus called me to enter His fold. With His tender love and

abundant mercy, my Lord Jesus Christ weaved the scarlet thread of salvation through my life. May all glory be given to the holy name of Jesus, our Almighty God in heaven.

In October 1987, I was brought to the True Jesus Church at Telok Kurau, Singapore. Immediately upon crossing the threshold of the gate, I sensed an overwhelming peace that hovered in the air. Strangely, I felt that I had come home. It was my first encounter with the entire congregation praying in tongues and it sounded to me as if many angels were conversing joyously. When I first sang the melodious hymn 296, tears welled up in my eyes as I beheld the church partaking the Holy Communion. I was deeply touched by the love and kindness that was manifested among the brothers and sisters in the church.

My third visit to the church occurred during the evangelical services in December 18–20, 1987. I pondered over the underlying messages inherent in the various sermons concerning salvation. On the last evening of the evangelical services, there was a special prayer session for the Holy Spirit. Those who wished to receive this precious heavenly gift were to step forward for the laying of hands by elders and deacons. I went forward and knelt down humbly. I did not know how to pray, and kept repeating “Hallelujah, praise the Lord!” Nevertheless, deep within my heart, I was calling out to God, “O God! What is the Holy Spirit that I am praying for right now? Are You the Holy Spirit? Please bestow on me this gift so that I may believe in You completely.”

Suddenly, a tremendous power descended upon my being and immediately my heart was set aglow by flames of indescribable joy! A channel of space was carved out between heaven and earth while I could feel God embracing me ever so tenderly in His bosom of love. The oil of the Holy Spirit kindled the inert spirit within me, and the meteoric flames of God set my soul ablaze to white heat. Immense joy came forth like torrential tidal waves that sprang from the depths of my heart. My body began to shake involuntarily, and my tongue rolled away in a language foreign to me. It dawned on me that God

had answered my simple prayer as my inner eye was opened to the mysteries of the Holy Spirit. Praise our Almighty God!

(extracted from Manna issue 25, 1995, pp. 41–42)

It is our earnest hope that all who have yet to receive the Holy Spirit be not discouraged, but to continue to pray with faith and perseverance. Please come and study the truth with us at the True Jesus Church, and share with us the spiritual joy of receiving the Holy Spirit! May all glory be given to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever. Amen.