

Something to Pray About

By Cindy Sears – September 2007

A Gift or A Requirement

During Sunday school class, someone asked about “speaking in tongues” as a sign of salvation or being filled with the Holy Spirit. Two class members have been accosted by others who have experienced *glossolalia* (glaw-soh-lay-lya) (Greek word for “tongue” or “language”) and believe that all Christians should experience it—or they are not truly saved.

In the New Testament (after Pentecost), speaking in tongues is mentioned as a sign or proof that some new believers had been given the Holy Spirit. (See Acts 10:44-48 and Acts 19:1-7.) Yet, when Paul listed the gifts from the Spirit of God, he said that there are different kinds of gifts—and tongues, both speaking and interpreting them—are placed at the end of the list. (See 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; 27-31a.) Note the question that Paul asked, expecting a negative reply: “Do all speak in tongues?” Also, when Paul was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, there was no mention of him speaking in tongues. (See Acts 9:17-19.)

Some Bible scholars and teachers think that *glossolalia* was used as a sign from God in the first days of Christianity to verify that the new revelation related to Jesus Christ did indeed come from God. Prophets who spoke for God in the Old Testament were given the power to do miracles for the same reason. It was a seal of authenticity from God.

Has God sent any new revelations to us since the time of the apostles? Some cults say “yes”, but most evangelical/protestant Christians say “no.” Before all the apostles had died, the ability to do miraculous signs had begun to wane. Even Paul was unable to heal one of his fellow workers. And Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:8 “...where there are tongues, they will be stilled...” Is he implying that as the Christian faith matures and grows stronger, speaking in tongues is no longer needed as a sign of authenticity? After all in today’s world, Bible translations and translators are readily available to almost everyone.

1 Corinthians 14:1-5, says that speaking in tongues is a personal communication between a person’s spirit and the Holy Spirit (unless someone can interpret what is being said). It only edifies that person, not the church body or visitors to the church. Today, speaking in tongues might even hinder someone from accepting the message of God. Do some people emphasize *glossolalia* now because we are such a self-centered or self-absorbed society? Are we more interested in our own relationship with God than in leading others to Christ? As for me, I would much rather be given the power to speak clearly in English and witness boldly for Jesus than to be able to speak in an “unknown” tongue that wouldn’t lead anyone to Christ—and might even turn them away—from fright or disgust or because they thought I was not quite “right in the head.” My suggestion: pray for the gift of boldness in witnessing, not for the gift of speaking in tongues.

—Cindy Sears