

Understanding Unknow and Known Tongues

While studying the Book of Acts, it dawned on me that in Acts 2 when the Holy Ghost was poured out, the disciples spoke in tongues, but these tongues were known tongues.

These were new tongues (Mark 16:17). They were supernatural and spoke as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance.

But why is it that when we hear people speak in tongues, they are speaking mostly unknown tongues, not as seen in Acts 2 for instance? My tongues are unknown and are not a language for some people, at least from my knowledge. The experience in Acts 2 appears to be detached and foreign to how the church understands tongues and how the tongues are commonly in operation, as we see in Acts 2 where the disciples spoke in native tongues of the people who were present.

How do we reconcile what happened in Acts 2, with what we experience in our day-to-day operation and/or speaking in tongues?

Speaking of being filled and baptized in the Holy Spirit, this new tongue(s)—can be classified and/or manifests in two ways:

1. Unknown Tongues

In 1 Corinthians 14, reveals an unknown tongue. 1 Corinthians 14:2 *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. 4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. 14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.*

- a) With the unknown tongue,
 - i) It is private and personal.
 - ii) We speak not unto men, but to God.
 - iii) Cannot be understood.
 - iv) In the spirit we speak mysteries
 - v) We edify ourselves when we speak in the unknown tongue.
 - vi) Our spirit prays.

2. Known Tongues

The known tongues are simply the tongues interpreted. They remain unknown until interpreted. What we see in Acts 2 is tongues interpreted for the people to understand. This was as supernatural as speaking in tongues itself. Interpretation is done by either God (Acts 2) or by another believer (1 Corinthians 14:27).

Acts 2:4-12 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

- a) The disciples were filled with the Holy Ghost and spoke in tongues that were known to the multitude that came together around them. These were unknown tongues like we operate in the private and personal prayer life that when used publicly as in this case (Acts 2) the Lord supernaturally interpreted it for the people to hear and understand what was being said in their very own native languages.
- b) The disciples simply spoke as the Spirit of God gave them utterance. This was unlearned, but so were the multitude's native languages they heard the disciples speak.
- c) The disciples were speaking wonderful works of God in tongues (*Acts 2:11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God*), but God turned it to the native language of the people.

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 14:18 *I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: 19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. 27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. 28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.*

- i) Known tongues used in church or publicly.
- ii) If any man speaks in church or publicly in tongue that is unknown, it must be made known to the people through interpretation. Paul reveals that if the tongue is not going to be interpreted and stays unknown, that man needs to keep it unknown to himself speaking to himself and to God privately.

- iii) 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:”*
 - o “Diverse kinds of tongues (one of the spiritual gifts Manifestations of the Spirit) are known tongues. The tongue becomes diverse after it is interpreted in various languages as we saw in Acts 2.
- iv) Given to the body to profit all people which further underscores the need for it to be interpreted.
- v) Operates typically in a church service where someone stands up or gives a message in tongues during worship or service.
- vi) Must be interpreted because tongues interpreted = to prophecy (Exhortation, edification, and comfort).
- vii) God is speaking to man.

In conclusion, Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48; and 19:1-6 were known tongues because they glorified God. How would Luke, the writer of Acts know that they glorified God if they spoke in their private unknown tongues? They had to have the tongues spoken interpreted from unknown to known for him to know that they glorified God.

In other words, tongues are either unknown (private and personal tongues) or known—unknown interpreted. These are public tongues such as a gathering or church setting.

Do all speak with tongues?

In 1 Corinthians 12:27-30, the Word says, “Do all speak with tongues?” This is not saying that believers do not all have to speak in tongues.

If we pay attention to the context, it is speaking about equipping office also known as fivefold, not *spiritual gifts* (1 Corinthians 12:1-11).

“Do all speak with tongues?” is saying just as **not all** people are called to be Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, not all have the office with prophets which operates in the speaking in tongues ministry and interpretation, and not all have the office of Evangelists that operates in workers of miracles gifts of healing. It is not to everyone but some. God has **set** some in the body ... 1 Corinthians 12:27-30.

The fivefold office ministry gifts are where we find the operation of various giftings such as known tongues, the working of miracles, gifts of healing, and interpretation.

- i) Miracles and gifts of healing refer to the office of an Evangelist. Governments = the office of the pastor.
- ii) The diversity of tongues and the interpretation of tongues approximates or falls under the equipping office of the prophet. A prophet ministers publicly in tongues and interpretation of tongues.
 - Tongues interpreted equals Prophecy.

Rich Kanyali