

**GLOSSOLALIA: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION  
OF THE PHENOMENON OF TONGUES IN  
ACTS 2:1-21**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper undertakes to present a critical examination of the phenomenon of Speaking in Tongues as recorded in the Lukan account of Acts 2:1-21. It argues that the need for the church to pursue a deeper, fuller and more biblically balanced understanding of glossolalia is necessary and helpful for the personal and corporate Christian well being of the church.

The Biblical overview of the concept of 'tongues' in the Old and New Testament, an exposition of the text of Acts 2:1-21 itself and its implications for Christians today are laid bare in this five chapter work.

It is hoped that readers will find the content of this work not only significant from an academic perspective but also personally relevant to them from a spiritual perspective.

## **B. Conclusion**

At this juncture the following conclusions and recommendations are made. Firstly, we conclude that;

1. The concept of tongues is vividly presented in the Old and New Testament and is not a subject that any one testament is oblivious of.
2. The concept of tongues is definitely connected with the experience for which the terms, baptism, outpouring infilling and enduement have been variously used to describe an experience in the Holy Spirit. This said experience was

prophesied in the Old Testament and found its fulfillment in the advent of the Spirit at the Jerusalem Pentecost event.

3. The gift of tongues is connected to the experience of being baptized or infilled with the Holy Spirit as one of the many products or consequences of the experience and not as an evidence of it.
4. The gift of tongues is not presented in the Bible account of Acts 2:1-21 and in the apostles understanding as being the special reserve of a few apostles or individuals but rather as one of the many gifts of grace that comes with the receiving of the Father's promise of the Spirit of grace-The Holy Spirit. A promise with a universal scope covering all who believe.
5. Just as the spectator on the day of Pentecost accused the disciples of being in an altered state of drunkenness, many today like Lasebikan also see glossolalia as being associated with disabilities, personality disorder and altered state of consciousness.<sup>79</sup> But the Bible in the context of Acts 2:1-21 and other supporting references especially in the Pauline corpus, does not teach the uncontrollable, frenzied or disorderly experience of this gift or its use in either private devotion or public ministrations.

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<sup>79</sup> G.L. Lasebikan, "Glossolalia: Its Relationship with Speech, disabilities and Personality Disorders", *Africa Theological Journal*, 14, 2 1985, 114.

6. As many, such as Harold Horton, have posited, speaking in tongues is permitted in public meetings of believers only.<sup>80</sup> The Bible nonetheless cautions the use of tongues in public and encourages its private use.
7. The experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of the gifts of grace. Howbeit, by the enablement of the Spirit, is still available today for all Christians as the context and text under examination suggests, and is deemed by scripture to so continue as long as the ministry of the Holy Spirit towards the personal and corporate edification of the church continues (1Corinthians 14:4-5).
8. The experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of these gifts as grace endowments without the exception of tongues, continue today and is deemed by scripture to so continue as long as they remain grace endowments and the gifts and callings of God remain without revocation (Romans 11:21).
9. The gifts of the Spirit including speaking in tongues are an integral part of Christ's great commission to the church. They are deemed by Christ himself to continue to accompany believers on the strength of their being believers in Christ who believe in his name and faithfully engaged themselves in the execution of the great commission. (Mark 16:16-19). For so Andrew Murray presents Pentecost as being mainly an

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<sup>80</sup> Harold Horton, The Gifts of the Spirit, (Great Britain: Evangel Press, 1976), 142.



empowerment of the church with the gift of the Spirit, for the world wide task of preaching the gospel to every creature.<sup>81</sup>

10. The gift of tongues is properly understood to be a gift of divers kinds of tongues. A diversity for which Obaje identifies four varieties, namely tongues as native, foreign, celestial and ecstatic languages.<sup>82</sup> This is a diversity that finds biblical warrant in the nature of its description. New tongues, unknown tongues, tongues of men, tongues of angels etc.

### **C. Recommendations**

Secondly, we recommend that;

1. All speakers in tongues should endeavour to become well informed of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world and to the church as T.P Stafford encourages.<sup>83</sup> So as to help them better understand how the giver-the Holy Spirit will have them use his gifts without abusing or misusing it.
2. All tongues speakers should endeavour to emulate the apostles and or disciples who first received this experience with regards to the manner of reception and its use. They should seek to avoid all forms of swoons, trance like hallucinations, irrational mannerisms and ecstasy that would misrepresent them as drunken babblers or “heathenistic” ventriliquists.

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<sup>81</sup> Andrew Murray, Back to Pentecost, (London: Oliphants Ltd., n.d), 48.

<sup>82</sup> Yusuf Ameh Obaje, The Miracle of Speaking in Tongues, Which Side are you on? (Ogbomoso: Adebayo Calvary Printers, 1987), 19-25.

<sup>83</sup> T.P. Stafford, A Study of the Holy Spirit, (Philadelpia: The Judson Press, 1920), 79.

