

## **Spiritual Gifts of Tongues and Interpretation**

The spiritual gift of tongues is more accurately called the gift of languages. The Greek word for tongues is glossa, which literally means “tongue.” When it is used in the New Testament addressing the subject of spiritual gifts it carries the contextual meaning of “languages.” Speaking in tongues is the utterance of prayer or of a message glorifying God, typically spoken to God (1 Corinthians 14:2), in a language that is unknown to the one speaking it.

To properly understand this gift, we need to begin with a brief history of language in the human race. In the garden mankind had one language and was in direct communication with God, having perfect communion with Him. Unfortunately, this relationship changed at the fall when Adam sinned against God and he and Eve were cursed and banished from Eden along with their descendants. Mankind continued to have one language up until Genesis 11 where God confused their language and people were dispersed throughout the earth. He did this because they had united together in one language and conspired to build a tower at Babel. Their intention was to “make a name” for themselves and thus replace God in their hearts. Pride is the birthplace of sin and regrettably fallen man has decided to use every advantage, including language, to usurp God’s authority and place himself upon a throne which is not rightfully his.

After God confused their language and scattered them across the earth, He chose one people with one language to bring Him glory and draw mankind back to Himself. Abram, later called Abraham, was the one through whom God promised to bless “all the nations.” Eventually, through the nation of Israel, the Hebrew language would be used to communicate God’s Word to the nations. However, the rest of the world did not speak or understand this language and for the most part continued to remain ignorant of God’s plan of redemption.

Fast forward to Pentecost and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the people of God. Here we see a glimpse of God’s reversal of the curse of divided languages. In Acts 2 people from all over the world hear God’s people proclaiming His mighty works in their own languages. This is the beginning of the redemption of language for its intended purpose: to glorify God and draw all people to Himself.

In heaven an innumerable group from every nation, tribe, people and tongue will join together to praise God with one language. (See Revelation 7:9-12. This is where tongues will cease as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10.) The intention of the spiritual gift of tongues is to glorify God now, but also to prepare ourselves as His church to glorify Him forever in heaven. The gift however is only partial, in that it is not given to all believers, and in the context of the church requires an interpreter in order for it to be edifying.

There is much more to be said about the spiritual gift of tongues, but we will summarize a few points here:

- Not every believer receives this gift. The gift of tongues is not a requirement or a necessary sign of salvation. See 1 Corinthians 12:30.

- Tongues can be human languages such as those heard in Acts 2, but often may be languages no one understands. See 1 Corinthians 14:2.
- Tongues are not “ecstatic speech” but are always orderly and are able to be controlled by the one speaking. See 1 Corinthians 14:27-28, 33, 39-40
- No tongues should be spoken in the church gathering without interpretation. See 1 Corinthians 14:27-28.
- Tongues should not be forbidden. See 1 Corinthians 14:39.

The Holy Spirit gives some believers the spiritual gift of tongues to glorify God and, with the help of an interpreter, to edify the church. This gift is dealt with extensively in the Scriptures and its use should be encouraged. That said, it should be used properly with pure motives and intentions, of course in the power and prompting of the Holy Spirit. See also 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30, 14:4, 39, Acts 2:4, Acts 19:6.

#### The Spiritual Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

The spiritual gift of interpretation of tongues is found alongside the gift of speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians 12:10. The Greek word for interpretation is *hermeneia* and simply means to interpret, explain, or expound some message that is not able to be understood in a natural way. Thus, this spiritual gift is the supernatural ability to understand and explain messages uttered in an unknown language.

This is a revelatory gift, meaning that God “reveals” the meaning of the words or message being spoken and allows the interpreter to communicate its meaning to those who need to hear it. When this happens in the church two things happen: the church is edified and God is glorified.

The spiritual gift of interpretation is given by the Holy Spirit to certain individuals to reveal messages spoken in an unknown tongue to God for the building up of the church. Like the gift of prophecy, tongues that are interpreted have the effect of encouraging and blessing the church to love and serve God more deeply and effectively. See also 1 Corinthians 12:10, 30; 14:1-28.