

Misconceptions about Tongues

Key Verse: Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.
(1 Corinthians 14:39-40, NKJV)

Introduction

This lesson is an addendum to Lesson 3: *The Person, Work, and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*. Both lessons (3 and 3a) should be studied for a well-rounded understanding of these issues.

There seems to be much confusion and disagreement on the purpose and the proper place of tongues. Some say tongues have passed away. Others say tongues are of the devil. While others say tongues are okay, but cannot be used at all in a church unless they are interpreted. This study will attempt to bring a biblical balance to the understanding of tongues.

What Is Tongues?

Tongues generally refers to the “gift of tongues,” a spiritual gift or manifestation of the Holy Spirit mentioned in several passages in the Bible. The gift of tongues is sometimes called glossolalia from the Greek word for tongues *glossa* (gloce sah).

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, NKJV)

In the Bible, the first recorded outpouring of the gift of tongues was on the Day of Pentecost several days after the resurrection of Jesus.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 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 2:1-4, NKJV)

Tongues are associated with what Jesus called the “Baptism with the Holy Spirit.” It is also called “filled with the Spirit.”

And being assembled together with *them*, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, “which,” *He said*, “you

have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:4-5, NKJV)

Speaking in another tongue in this context occurs when a person is empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak a language that he does not know. This language can be one of the many human languages (tongues of men) or can be a heavenly language (tongues of angels).

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1, NKJV)

 **Are tongues always in a human language?** ___ yes ___ no

The Purpose of Tongues

Tongues serve several purposes as explained in the Bible.

- Edifies (builds up) the one who prays (1 Corinthians 14:4, Jude 20)
- Edifies or instructs others when accompanied with the gift of interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:2-5)
- Empowers the believer for ministry (Acts 1:5,8; Acts 4:29-31)
- Help when you don't know how to pray as you should (Romans 8:26-27)
- Richer words for praise and worship of the Lord (Acts 2:4,11)
- A sign to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:21-25)
- Evidence of God's work in believers (Acts 10:44-48, 11:15-18)

Common Misconceptions about Tongues

Following are some common misconceptions about tongues.

Tongues Have Passed Away

Some people claim that tongues were once a valid work of God, but that they have passed away and are no longer valid. They often use part of the following verse to support their view.

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. (1 Corinthians 13:8-10, NKJV)

The question we must ask is, “what is the *perfect* referred to here and when does it come?” The Greek word for perfect here means *complete*. This passage contrasts that which is perfect (complete) with that which is in part (incomplete).

Could “that which is perfect” refer to the Bible? It is complete in that it contains all that God intended for it to contain. However, it does not contain all knowledge and information.

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen. (John 21:25, NKJV)

Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." (Revelation 10:4, NKJV)

If God knew that tongues would not be needed after the Bible was completed, why does the Bible contain instructions on the proper functioning of tongues? The Corinthians needed the instructions before the Bible was written, but it wasn't necessary for God to get those instructions into the Bible if tongues were not going to be given after that. We must conclude that since God made sure the instructions about tongues are in the Bible, then tongues did not pass away with the coming of the Bible.

The key to understanding 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 is given just two verses later.

But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (1 Corinthians 13:10-12, NKJV)

The perfect here refers to the perfection that comes to a believer at his resurrection. At that time, he will see the Lord clearly. There will be no need for tongues or learning (knowledge) in the New Kingdom.

Tongues will cease when their purposes are no longer needed. Do we need edification? Does the Church need edification? Are there times when we need help from the Holy Spirit so we can pray according to God's will? Do we still find our earthly languages inadequate for praising and worshipping our Lord? Then the need for tongues has not ceased.

 **Did the Bible eliminate the need for Tongues?** ___ yes ___ no

Tongues are of the Devil

Have you ever heard of a counterfeit \$13 bill? By nature, you cannot have a counterfeit if there is no genuine. There are counterfeit tongues just like there is a counterfeit salvation and a counterfeit Jesus. However, do we stay away from encouraging people to be saved just because the enemy has a counterfeit? So why do we do that with tongues?

All instances in the New Testament where the gift of tongues are discussed describe it as a work of the Holy Spirit. Not one attributes it to the devil. So when did God lose tongues and the devil get it? One of the strongest warnings that Jesus gave anyone was when people said that the work He did by the Holy Spirit was actually empowered by the devil.

Now when the Pharisees heard *it* they said, "This *fellow* does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be

forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come. (Matthew 12:24-32, NKJV)

While there may be instances where people speak in a counterfeit tongues to deceive (Matthew 24:24), we must be very careful not to claim that a genuine work of the Holy Spirit comes by the power of Satan.

Tongues Must Always Be Interpreted

There is only one purpose of tongues that the Bible states needs interpretation: the edification of the Church. The other purposes of tongues do not require interpretation. Therefore, to know whether a tongue needs interpretation, you need to know the purpose of that instance of tongues. All of the purposes for tongues can be needed in church, so not every instance of tongues in a church needs interpretation.

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, NKJV)

When a person is praying in the Spirit privately (in a crowd or alone), the purpose of the tongues is edification of the one praying or praying according to the will of God. This tongue does not require interpretation because he is speaking to God and God doesn't need an interpreter. This is true even when praying "privately" in a group or in church, (between yourself and God, 1 Corinthians 14:28).

For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Corinthians 14:2, NKJV)

When tongues are spoken out in a church or small group where the purpose is to instruct the group or to pray in agreement, they require interpretation.

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14:18-19, NKJV)

Before speaking in tongues in church or to a small group, how do you know if someone is present to whom the Spirit will give the gift of interpretation? Often, you do not. If the Holy Spirit prompts you to give a message in tongues to the church or a small group, then speak it out at an appropriate time. Then pray that the Lord will provide the interpretation. If no interpretation is spoken, then another tongue should not be given during the meeting. In such cases, it may be that the person giving the tongues misunderstood or that the person who should have given the interpretation failed to respond due to fear or some other reason. In such cases, we should not be critical of either the person giving the tongues or

the person who did not give the interpretation. However, to be sure that all is done decently and in order, another message in tongues should not be given.

When do tongues need an interpretation?

Tongues Are an Ecstatic, Uncontrollable Utterance

Sometimes, people think that the Holy Spirit will take control of their mouths and do the speaking when they receive the gift of tongues. The Spirit gives the words to you, but you do the speaking part.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4, NKJV)

Occasionally, you may find the joy of the Lord bubbling up in you so strongly that you almost cannot contain yourself. However, you still have control and are expected to follow guidelines for exercising this gift according to Bible instructions (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, see page 4).

Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40, NKJV)

Tongues Is the Least Gift and Thus Unimportant

Since 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (see page 1) lists tongues toward the end, some people think tongues is the least important gift. However, the most important gift at any time is the one you need the most at that time. Each gift from God has an important purpose. Even if tongues were the least gift that God has for us, why would He waste His time giving us something that is not important. Moreover, who would be so foolish to tell God, "No thank you, that gift is not important enough for me to waste my time on it. Just give it to someone else."

Tongues Are Not for Everyone

Every believer needs the power that Jesus promised would come with the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. As Jesus promised, every disciple in the upper room (men, women, and possibly children) received the gift of tongues.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4, NKJV)

Every believer needs to be edified, and there are times when every believer needs help praying according to God's will. God made provisions to meet our needs through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and tongues. Why reject His provisions to meet your needs? Paul said,

I wish you all spoke with tongues, (1 Corinthians 14:5, NKJV)

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39, NKJV)

"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:9-13, NKJV)

 **If you are a believer, is the gift of tongues for you? ___ yes ___ no**

Conclusion

Tongues are one of God's provisions to empower us to accomplish His will for our lives. They are not earned or merited by any quality or ability on our part. Therefore, we should receive the gift of tongues with humility and rejoice when others receive the gift. Never look down on others who have not experienced the Baptism in the Holy Spirit and tongues.

The Baptism with the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues helps you become a better servant of God than you would be without it. It is not intended to make you a better servant than another brother or sister who has not received it. Do not compare yourself with others. It leads only to pride or discouragement.


For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Corinthians 10:12, NKJV)

Jesus is your standard of comparison. Strive to attain the goal He has set before you, keeping your eyes on Him.

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, (Hebrews 12:1-2, NKJV)

Response To Truth

 **Is the gift of tongues for you today? ___ yes ___ no**

 **Are you willing to receive everything that God has for you, including tongues?
___ yes ___ no**