

The Mystery of Tongues

Lesson 3: The School of the Holy Spirit

“The Lord said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute or the deaf, or the seeing or the blind? Is it not I, the Lord?”

(Exodus 4:11)

“For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.” (Isaiah 28:11-12)

*“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; **18** they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”*

(Mark 16:17-18)

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:4)

What is speaking in tongues?

- Speaking in tongues is speaking forth a *known* or *unknown* language — that is *unknown* to the speaker.
- The tongue speaker is able to release the language, not because they learned it, but because the Holy Spirit is enabling them— as they yield to Him.
- This is not a skill that is learned or a talent that is developed, rather it is a special gift from the Holy Spirit.
- The significance of speaking in tongues is that when the Holy Spirit can get a hold of your tongue, He can get a hold of your life.

“Indeed, we all make many mistakes. For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. (James 3:2-4)

Different Types of Tongues

The New Testament Scriptures teach us that there are “*different types of tongues*” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

1. Known languages and unknown languages.

Known Languages:

“When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken.” (Acts 2:6)

Unknown Languages:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Corinthians 13:1)

- “That the Corinthians at least, and probably Paul, thought of tongues as the language(s) of the angels seems highly likely—for two reasons: (1) There is some evidence from Jewish sources that the angels were believed to have their own heavenly language (or dialect) and that by means of the “Spirit” one could speak this dialect. Thus in the Testament of Job 48–50 Job’s three daughters are given “charismatic sashes” which when put on allowed

Hemera, for example, to speak “ecstatically in the angelic dialect, sending up a hymn to God with the hymnic style of the angels. And as she spoke ecstatically, she allowed ‘The Spirit’ to be inscribed on her garment.” — Dr. Gordon Fee

“For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 14:2)

“Even so, if unbelievers or people who don’t understand these things come into your church meeting and hear everyone speaking in an unknown language, they will think you are crazy.” (1 Corinthians 14:23)

- Since Corinth was a very socially and ethnically diverse city. If the speaking in tongues were known languages, an unbeliever could walk in and hear their own dialect/language and think the people are learned, not crazy. But these *tongues* were primarily *unknown* languages.

2. Public tongues and Personal tongues.

Public tongues:

“What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a

revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.” (1 Corinthians 14:26-28)

Private tongues:

- Tongues is not just for the corporate gathering, but for private use as well.

“the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.” (1 Corinthians 14:26-28)

- When we speak in tongues privately, it builds up our spirits.

“Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.” (1 Corinthians 14:4)

- Many of the spiritual leaders from the Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Third Wave movements believe speaking in tongues was the secret to Paul’s revelation of the Word and effectiveness in ministry.

*“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.”
(1 Corinthians 14:18)*

- We see speaking in tongues as a prayer language, not just a public proclamation.

“For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 14:2)

“Speaking in tongues is a powerful, God-given tool. It brings and intimacy and communion and fellowship with God that can be achieved in no other way. And that is why Satan fights so hard against it.” — Chuck Smith

- The Holy Spirit is our helper (John 14:16) — and this gift helps us to pray and worship — without the limitations of our human intellect.

“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” (1 Corinthians 14:15)

*“When prayer reaches its ultimate, words are impossible”
— Savonarola (15th Century)*

What happens when we speak in tongues?

“different types (genres) of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

- The different genres will accomplish different purposes.

- **1. A Sign for Unbelievers.**
 - *“(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:11)*

 - *“Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers...” (1 Corinthians 14:22)*

 - A longtime member of our church family grew up in Kansas on the farm. One day, he was talking to a Jewish Rabbi and just felt led to speak in tongues. The Rabbi responded, *“I guess you are a Christian.”* The farm boy asked, *“How did you know?”* He responded, *“You just told me in Hebrew that Jesus Christ is the Messiah.”*

 - *“After my sermon, one brother gave a message (in tongues) and another interpreted. When they had finished, a young man walked to the front and spoke in a foreign language to*

the one who had given the message. The brother answered, 'I'm sorry, sir, but I don't understand any other language.' The man replied, ' But you spoke my language beautifully, I am Persian. You spoke my language and told me that I must get right with God, that I must find God right now.' — Lester Sumrall, The Gifts and Ministries of the Holy Spirit

- 2. Assistance in Intercession.

- *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27)*

- *“Many times as we speak unto God in an unknown tongue, we are in intercession and as we pray thus in the Spirit we pray according to the will of God” — Smith Wigglesworth*

- *“praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” — Ephesians 6:18*

- *“Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32)*

- 3. Engaging in Heavenly Worship.

- *“So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.” (1 Corinthians 14:15)*
- *“So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”
(Ephesians 5:17-20)*
- *“One of the most beautiful forms of this gift is when the whole congregation is singing in tongues together, in a rising and falling harmony inspired by the Holy Spirit, worshipping God as with one voice.” — Randy Clark*

- *"And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of many waters and the loud rumbling of thunder. And the sound I heard was like harpists strumming their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders."* (Revelation 14:2)

- **4. Unlocking Revelation, Knowledge, Prophecy, and/or Teaching. (1 Corinthians 14:6)**
 - *"Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?"* (1 Corinthians 14:6)

 - In your personal time of speaking in tongues, interpretation may come in the form of illumination, inspiration, and you may need to journal what you are receiving. It usually comes like a flood. (This was how many Spirit-filled writers, including John Bevere, wrote their books, and broke through writers blocks.)

- **5. Building up our Spirit.**
 - *"Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves"* (1 Corinthians 14:4)

- *“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20)*
- *“Praying in tongues charges your spirit like a battery charger charges a battery” — Kenneth E. Hagin*

How can we discern which genre of tongues is coming forth?

The message in tongues is a *mystery* to the one releasing it, until there is an *interpretation*. Interpretation of tongues is another grace-gift of the Holy Spirit. Through the interpretation of tongues, the mind is illuminated.

Spirit-initiated Tongues vs. Self-initiated Tongues

When Tongues are Spirit-initiated:

- When experiencing an infilling or baptism in the Spirit.
 - When tongues is first experienced by an individual it seems to gush forth. Not that the speaker has absolutely no control, but a powerful river flows out of the spirits and out of their mouths (Acts 2:4, Acts 10:46, Acts 19:6).

- *“An overwhelming consciousness of God’s presence possessed me. A new rush of power, taking hold of my flesh, seemed to come from my feet and move upward. My throat and tongue began to move in a strange manner, and I found that I was unable to speak in English. And presently, I began to speak in another language, one that I had never learned, by the power of the Spirit.” — John G. Lake, My Baptism in the Spirit*

- When the Spirit wants to release a proclamation.
 - Derek Prince’s future son-in-law was invited to hear him preach at a meeting in London. He spoke Welsh. After Derek was done teaching he was preparing to give an altar call. An elderly man gets up and releases an utterance in tongues. Derek was a bit upset because he felt it did not come at the right time. The future son-in-law was not yet saved, and asked Derek’s daughter, *“Why did elderly man just told everyone all of my sins in my dialect?”* It took some convincing him, but Derek and his daughter explained to him that the elderly man does not speak Welsh, but released a message in tongues. The gift of interpretation of tongues was not needed to understand the message in tongues.

- When the Spirit wants to release a prophesy.

- It comes more forcefully and spontaneously.
- In 2009, I wake up in the middle of the night, with the Spirit on me, and I exploded in tongues — then the interpretation followed, “Revival is coming to the South Bay”. That interpretation was followed by a vision of a revival center at the intersection of the 91, 405, and 110 freeways. Cars were driving down the 110 Freeway to get to the revival center. That’s when I knew I would be building a revival center in the South Bay.
- In 2014, we were at church on a Friday night, and a man who is generally on the quieter side explodes in tongues. I receive the interpretation and start declaring that the Lord is giving to us new venue with 300 seats! And we start proclaiming that whoever has it, needs to give it up! On Monday, the man who released the tongues gets into a conversation with his neighbor who tells him he has a 300 seat event center, and wondered if he knew anyone who wanted to rent it. We moved our church there immediately to intersection of Western Ave. and Lomita Blvd.

When Tongues are Self-initiated:

When the believer needs help praying and worshipping — the tongues may be Spirit-made intercession and Spirit-formed worship.

- When there is a sense of heaviness or warfare, you can pray in tongues to break it off.
- When you feel tired, you can pray in tongues and get energized from the inside out.
- When you are needing the other gifts of the Spirit to be stirred up, pray more in tongues.
 - *“I have found in my own life over a period of more than 60 years that the more I speak in tongues — the more I pray and worship God in tongues — the more manifestations of the other gifts of the Spirit I have in my life too. And the less I speak in tongues, the less manifestations of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit I have operating in my life...” — Kenneth E. Hagin*
- When your heart is so overwhelmed by the goodness, beauty, and majesty of our God, that you feel words are insufficient, you can choose to worship in tongues.
 - *“But if at times, when the heart expands in love at the thought of God’s graciousness and mercy, it is all right to surrender our*

mind, to let it go in songs of praise and gratitude, I feel I have opened up to the Bridegroom...” — Bernard of Clairvaux (12th Century)

- *“Our Lord sometimes gives the soul feelings of jubilation and a strange prayer it doesn’t understand. I am writing about this favor here so that if He grants it to you, you may give Him such praise and know what is taking place...It seems like gibberish.” — Teresa of Avila (16th Century)*

- When you feel confused and need clarity, you can pray in tongues — and your mind can then be illuminated.

- *“Then he said to me, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words, but the prince of the kingdom of Persia stood in my way for twenty-one days, until finally Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me.’” (Daniel 10:12-13)*
- *“Tongues have been the making of my ministry. Many times, I climb out of bed, take my pencil and pad, and jot down the beautiful things of God, the wonderful things of God that He talks out in my spirit and reveals to my heart.” — John G. Lake*

What is the Interpretation of Tongues?

“The interpretation of tongues is not an operation of the human mind. It is the functioning of the Holy Spirit through the mind. The interpreter does not understand the language or the tongue that he is interpreting. His mental faculties are not a part of the message, so he has no thought in his mind as to what the Spirit is going to say, if he does, He is not interpreting by the Spirit.” — Lester Sumrall

- The interpretation of tongues is not a direct translation, but an interpretation. It can come in the form of flowing words or inspired visions.
- In the public gathering, interpretation may come forth publicly after the tongues is given in public.
 - Everyone flows in gifts a bit differently. For Derek Prince, he will get maybe just the first sentence or phrase and will need to step out with it for the rest to come.
 - For another church that Derek Prince preached at, the interpretation would come in the form of visions. That’s how the pastor flowed. Derek believed that the Lord works according to our faith, and if that’s what the church sees modeled, that’s what they have faith for.

What if I don't speak in tongues, but want to?

- The classical Pentecostal perspective is that tongues as a prayer language of tongues is available to all who are baptized by the Spirit. However the public gift of tongues may not be operating in every believer all the time — but it is according to God's will in a gathering. What supports this perspective is that the gift of miracles and healings listed before, are not automatic, but sovereign, so is the public tongue.
- ***“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:29-31)***
- We have full permission to desire this gift of speaking in tongues and can still ask the Father for this gift.
- If we already speak in tongues, we should long for the interpretation of tongues.
- ***“If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11)***

- *“For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.” (Luke 14:13)*

- The gift of tongues seems to be unlocked when people are overwhelmed by the Spirit of God. The Spirit can fall sovereignly (Acts 10) or through the laying on of hands (Acts 19).

- *“for of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:45)*