

Discipleship Groups — Level 5

WEEK 2

The Gift of Tongues and Interpretation

Hello, and welcome to this week's discipleship groups! We are continuing our study on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned last week, these gifts are not innate to our being; they are bestowed on us through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit that are listed in 1 Corinthians 12, five of them are speaking gifts, which are the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom, the gift of prophecy, and the gift of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues...which the last two are what we are going to speak about today.

It is interesting to me that the majority of the gifts of the Holy Spirit are speaking gifts. As a matter of fact, in 1 Corinthians 12, in a prelude to speaking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul says that before our life in Christ Jesus, we were "lead astray to mute idols." It's worthy of note that the description Paul uses of these idols is that they are mute; they are speechless. This echoes Psalm 115:4-5, which says: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak..."

In contrast, the Bible shows God as the God who speaks. In fact, this is the very first action we see Him doing in the entire Bible! "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...AND GOD SAID..."

This cannot be underestimated or overlooked. In fact, it is NOT overlooked by the Apostle John, who, in the Gospel of John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The original title for Jesus Christ was "the Word," and this Word was the source of all creation.

Throughout the whole of Scripture, we see that the Spirit of God and the Word of God are inseparable, just as it is impossible for us to speak words without our own breath, so it is with the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

It is the nature of God to speak and to communicate with His people, and it is the nature of God's Holy Spirit to work in conjunction with Jesus Christ, God's Word. It is a fallacy to think that the same Voice that brought the universe into existence is now entirely contained and limited to the ink on paper in the Bible. The Bible is God's written Word, but His Voice still resounds throughout the universe and in the hearts of people.

Now, don't misunderstand me: I am not proposing that there is more to be written of the Bible, nor am I diminishing the power of God's written Word. Not at all—because the Bible is still His Word. The Bible is authoritative in our lives, it is a closed canon, and it is the anchor for all of our doctrine and theology. But God's Voice is not confined to paper and ink—NOR WILL IT CONTRADICT WHAT IS WRITTEN ON PAPER AND INK!

Since we were made in God's image, the power of our words reflects the power of God's Voice. Words are creative and powerful. When we pray, things happen. When we lift our voice to God in worship, it is powerful. When we call upon His name, He answers. When we use our words to combat the enemy in the name of Jesus, he flees.

With this as our starting point, we turn to the last two of the five speaking gifts of the Holy Spirit: the gift of speaking in tongues and the gift of interpreting tongues.

Jesus Himself first mentioned the gift of tongues in Mark 16:17, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues..." The God who speaks the worlds into existence, is also the God who took His Word and put it onto stone tablets, He is also the God who took His Word and wrapped it into human flesh, and He is also the same God who writes that Word on our hearts, fills us with His Holy Spirit, and then speaks through us the power of His Word by the same Holy Spirit.

So, is it any wonder that God can—and still does—use the supernatural power of His Holy Spirit to speak to us and through us? Of course it is not—it is in God's nature to do so. Speaking in tongues helps us to pray, to do spiritual warfare, to worship, and to grow personally.

The power of speaking in tongues is that it allows God to intervene through the power of our words beyond the limits of our humanity. Romans 8:26 says, "Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

There are moments when words fail us, or there are things going on that need to be prayed for that we simply don't know or understand. The Holy Spirit uses the power of our words to pray through us back to God in a language that is not our own, known as tongues. He is using us and the transformational power of the spoken word to change a situation through praying in tongues. It is a POWERFUL weapon. It is the same in spiritual warfare. There are spiritual battles that need to be fought and speaking in tongues is a weapon to use against the enemy.

There are also times in worship that the limits of our human language keep us from fully expressing what we feel in our spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:4 says that when we speak in tongues, we are speaking mysteries to God. We are speaking to Him and to no one else. Unleashing the gift of tongues gives full expression to the Spirit's work beyond our natural capabilities. It is truly part of worshiping "in spirit and truth." 1 Corinthians 14:15 says, "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Praying with tongues privately also helps us to grow spiritually. 1 Corinthians 14:4 says that we are edifying ourselves—which is a great thing! Jude 1:20 says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."

I pray in tongues a lot...and frankly, I could do it even more! But praying in tongues helps to fortify our spirit in the Lord.

There is a difference between the PERSONAL use of speaking in tongues and the CORPORATE, PUBLIC use of speaking in tongues. I have just outlined the personal usage, and I would like to briefly discuss two corporate practices. The first does not require interpretation, the second does. The first time tongues was given to the Church in Acts chapter 2, we see that 120 people gathered together in the upper room spontaneously began to speak together in worship to the Lord without interpretation. It could be argued that the interpretation was in the fact that the people who gathered from all parts of the world understood the "wonderful works of God" in their own language. However, among the disciples, there was no "interpretation," and they were all praising the Lord together in this newly given gift.

Also, in Acts chapter 10, Peter went to Cornelius' house to preach the Gospel. Before the sermon was finished, everyone spontaneously started to speak in tongues, presumably in praise to God, and there was no interpretation given. There are moments when it is appropriate to praise God together with the expression of tongues with no interpretation. The interpretation in those moments is that it is simply corporate praise to God. Just think about it for a moment. Is this really that strange? I certainly don't think it is, neither, for the previously given reasons, do I think it is unbiblical. When we all lift up our voices together in spontaneous praise to God in English, do we all hear each other, and do we all understand what everyone is saying in the din of all the expressive praise. No. Does this require special interpretation? No, because we are all praising God together.

There is, however, another use of tongues that requires the use of the gift of the interpretation of tongues. 1 Corinthians 14 clearly describes tongues being used as a prophetic utterance. There are appropriate moments in the church when a person may speak out in tongues for all to hear. However, what good does that do anyone unless we can all understand it? What if I gave my sermon in Swedish? How would that help anyone unless they spoke Swedish? I give the sermons in English and Spanish because that is what is helpful for everyone.

It is no different with tongues. There are moments when the Holy Spirit moves upon a person to give a prophetic message in tongues. But 1 Corinthians 14:13 says, "Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret." You might ask, "how can someone interpret a language they never learned." Exactly in the same way a person can SPEAK a language they never learned! It is a supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit at work in a person by giving them understanding. Once the message in tongues is interpreted, everyone can be built up and grow in the Lord.

Here at Pathway, we have had moments of tongues and interpretations, thought it has not happened with much frequency. This is a powerful gift given to the church, and one that should be engaged with. There are people who have felt moved to give a tongue in the past but refrained because they were afraid of either looking foolish or being out of

order. This is a place where we move in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is room in our church for these manifestations. If anything ends up being out of order, or at an inopportune moment, we can talk about it and grow through it together! Let the gifts of the Holy Spirit be manifest so all of us can be mutually strengthened!

God bless you! Speak in tongues a lot and grow in Jesus a lot!