

Speaking in Tongues – the Spiritual Gift of Languages

PURPOSE The gift of tongues is the ability to suddenly speak and understand a previously unknown language with the purpose of spreading the gospel.

FOCUS Jesus is not a God of confusion, but of peace.

Introduction Have you heard of the gift of tongues? There are many different views about speaking in tongues. But if we want God's opinion, we have to read the Bible.

First, we need to understand that speaking in tongues is one of the spiritual gifts.

1 Cor 12:28-30 Glossa = language (**Rev 14:6**). Who gives gifts? Do all get the gift of tongues? What is the purpose of the spiritual gifts?

Acts 1:4-5, 8 Why would the disciples receive the Holy Spirit's power? For mission! Problem: They only speak one language. Jesus promised a solution (**Mark 16:15-17**).

A few days later, they experienced the fulfillment of the promise...

Acts 2:1-11 What happened when the Holy Spirit fell on the apostles? They were given the ability to tell others about the "mighty works of God" in new languages.

We clearly see that speaking in tongues was given to spread the Gospel. Paul says the same thing...

1 Cor 14:21-22 Who is the gift of tongues for? It was given in order to spread the gospel to people groups who did not understand Hebrew. IE: Derek Morris. IE: Arabic.

Every time someone receives the gift of tongues in the early church, they preach, prophesy or praise.

Acts 10:43-46 When Cornelius' household received the Holy Spirit, did Peter and the others understand what was spoken? It was the same gift as in Acts 2 (**Acts 11:15**).

Let's look at the final example in Acts...

Acts 19:6 Were intelligible words spoken when they received the gift of tongues?

But what about 1 Corinthians 14? Doesn't it say that tongues are unintelligible ecstatic utterances?

1 Cor 14:26-31 Many languages were spoken in the port city of Corinth (**1 Cor 1:5**). They had been blessed with many spiritual gifts, including the ability to speak different languages. But conflicts arose when members of Corinth stood up and preached, prayed, sang or prophesied in the language they had been blessed with without translation. Some even did so to show how spiritually superior they were (**1 Cor 14:12, 13:1-5**). Confusion and disorder followed, and Paul sternly admonished them.

Let's read what his main point was...

1 Cor 14:5-13 Can one be blessed and edified by incomprehensible speech?

Paul insisted that everyone must understand what is said/prayed/sung in the church.

1 Cor 14:14-25 What are Paul's main points in the text? We should always pray, speak and sing in the Spirit (**Eph 6:18, Rom 8:26-27**) but also with the understanding. If we thank God, it must mean that we ourselves understand what we are saying (v.16). But those who do not understand the language in which I thank God are not edified (v.17), my understanding bears no fruit. I speak into thin air (v.9). Then it is better that I pray silently to myself, so that no one hears (v.28, 2).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray in an intelligible, meaningful, heartfelt and humble way.

Matt 6:7-13 There was a false method of prayer/tongues used by the Gentiles. Many times they themselves did not understand what they were saying. IE: Oracle of Delphi, Hinduism, voodoo etc. Jesus warned about this and modelled intelligible prayers. Danger: Basing one's assurance of salvation and spirituality on the ability to babble unintelligible phrases instead of on Christ.

APPEAL If you have done this in ignorance, it does not mean that you are possessed by evil spirits or that your whole religious experience has been false. But Jesus wants to bring us into a full knowledge of the truth. Is it your willingness to follow the light the Bible gives on this matter? Are you willing to say to God, "Lord, if this is not from you, I am willing to let you take it away from me"?

APPENDIX – Objections & Quotes

1 Cor 14:2-5

Paul's words here are not a declaration of how things should be, but a declaration of how deplorable the situation was in Corinth (cf. v.23 & 28). His point is that the gift of tongues (the ability to speak another language) has no purpose if it is not used to convey some edifying, intelligible knowledge.

1 Cor 13:1

Read **v.2-3** as well. Paul did not say that he actually spoke the language of angels. He is making a hypothetical exaggeration to show that even if he could speak all the languages of the world, even the language of angels, it would be completely meaningless if he did not have love. Paul spoke more languages than all of them (1 Cor 14:18). But he felt no need to show it off to the churches he came to. His aim was to be understood (1 Cor 14:19).

Ellen White

"Some of these persons have exercises which they call gifts and say that the Lord has placed them in the church. They have an unmeaning gibberish which they call the unknown tongue, which is unknown not only by man but by the Lord and all heaven. Such gifts are manufactured by men and women, aided by the great deceiver. Fanaticism, false excitement, false talking in tongues, and noisy exercises have been considered gifts which God has placed in the church. Some have been deceived here. The fruits of all this have not been good. "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Fanaticism and noise have been considered special evidences of faith. Some are not satisfied with a meeting unless they have a powerful and happy time. They work for this and get up an excitement of feeling. But the influence of such meetings is not beneficial. When the happy flight of feeling is gone they sink lower than before the meeting because their happiness did not come from the right source." (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church 1*, p. 412)

"When these discordant ones, holding their different views, come together and there is considerable excitement and the unknown tongue, they let their light so shine that unbelievers would say: These people are not sane; they are carried away with a false excitement, and we know that they do not have the truth." (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church 1*, p. 419)