

## Understanding Tongues Part 2

1 Corinthians 14:20-25

### **BI: God's purpose for the gift of tongues may not be what you think.**

Last week we began learning about what the Bible teaches about the gift of tongues. Now we don't have time to do a full review, but let me just highlight some of the key points we discovered in our study of 1 Cor. 14:1-19.

1. First, we noted how shockingly similar Paul's description of the ecstatic gibberish that was taking place in the church of Corinth was as compared with the ecstatic gibberish that has always been central to the ancient mystery cults. It's important to note here that everyone who studies this passage sees a difference between the tongues that were empowered by the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, and the tongues that were being employed in Corinth. Pentecostal teachers see this and conclude that the tongues of 1 Cor. 14 is a private prayer language designed for the edification of the individual. We see the same thing and conclude, however, that the tongues of 1 Cor. 14 is a perversion of the gift that was granted to the church in Acts two. Paul is not condoning such unintelligible speech in the church, he is condemning it. (You'll have to pick up the recording from last week to understand Paul's flow of thought.
2. Second, we saw that even the true gift of tongues should be considered a secondary gift to the body of Christ for three reasons.

First, because it cannot edify. (1-5)

Second, because it is unintelligible. (6-10)

Third, because it is emotional rather than mental (11-19)

Again, we covered all of that last week. This week, however, we pick up in verse 19 where Paul explains what the true purpose of tongues actually is... and I think the answer is going to be surprising to most of us.

Before we learn from Paul what the true purpose of the gift of tongues is, let's take a few minutes to consider what I believe are some false views of its purpose.

1. It is not for self-edification. Many of our Pentecostal and charismatic brothers tell us that the purpose of tongues is self-edification. Les D. Crause, in an article called *The Purpose of Speaking in Tongues* writes, "If you are a believer and have not yet received the ability to pray in tongues then you are a believer lacking what is probably the most important gift available *for you personally*. The other gifts of the Spirit are for you to minister to others, but *the gift of tongues is the one gift that is given exclusively for you* to help you in your spiritual life. Paul said that speaking in tongues *builds up the one who*

*is doing it.*" ([http://www.gmrnet.org/archives/articles/ldc\\_purpose-tongues.htm](http://www.gmrnet.org/archives/articles/ldc_purpose-tongues.htm))

According to this view, praying in tongues is a way to have your own personal communion with God. But as we saw last week, Paul goes out of his way to explain that this is not true. In verse 2, Paul says that the one who speaks in ecstatic gibberish does not speak to men (a violation of the purpose for the gifts) but to "a god" (such as was the practices of the mystery religions they had been saved out of). Furthermore, "no one understands" (which points back to the need for edification). "But in his spirit" (or with his emotions) he speaks "mysteries." The exact word used in GK for the doctrines and practices of the mystery religions.

Paul is not *commending* a personal prayer language. He is rebuking it! In fact, that's the point of these first 19 verses. And it's why Paul concludes by saying, "in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may *instruct others* also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). For this, and all the reasons we saw last week, tongues is not intended to be a personal prayer language.

2. Tongues are not primarily for Evangelism: Some will point back to the book of Acts and show that after the apostles spoke in tongues, 3,000 people were baptized. That is certainly true, but we need to observe this text carefully and see that what was being spoken in tongues was *NOT* the gospel. Acts 2:11 says they were "speaking the mighty deeds of God." What does that mean?

When you trace "the mighty deeds of God" though the O.T., you find the ancient biblical writers declaring the awesome and miraculous things God has done. Namely, that He created all that is; that He caused a great flood to cover the earth; that He rescued Israel from the iron rule of Egypt; that He killed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea; that He gave Israel His law; and that He judged His enemies with fierce wrath. These are "the mighty deeds of God" as Jewish people would have known them.

Tongues was not a means of preaching the gospel. But when the people in Jerusalem heard the sound like a rushing, mighty wind and came to see what had happened, they found a group of Jewish men speaking languages they had never learned and proclaiming all the glorious things that the Scriptures reveal God had done.

If you want a sample of what the apostles were saying, just read Luke 1:46-55 where Mary (the Mother of Jesus) breaks forth in spontaneous praise to God for his mighty deeds. Here is a sample:

Luke 1:49–55

<sup>49</sup> "For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. <sup>50</sup> "AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. <sup>51</sup> "He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were* proud in the thoughts of their heart.

<sup>52</sup> "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were humble. <sup>53</sup>

“HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. <sup>54</sup> “He has given help to Israel His servant, In remembrance of His mercy, <sup>55</sup> As He spoke to our fathers, To Abraham and his descendants forever.”

Now, Mary was not speaking with the gift of tongues here, but what she says is consistent with the description of what the Apostles were proclaiming in other languages in Acts 2. The point is simply this, that the gift of tongues was not intended to be a means of proclaiming the gospel. What it did, however, was prepare the crowd to hear Peter preach the gospel which brought 3,000 people to Christ.

So the gift of tongues is not a prayer language, and it is not a miraculous means of preaching the gospel.

3. Tongues is not proof of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: For example, In Acts 2, when Peter was preaching his great sermon he said, (2:38), “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The problem is that the text says nothing about any of those people speaking in tongues.

Consider also Acts 4:31 which reads, “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.” But there is no mention of tongues.

Furthermore, look at 1 Cor. 12:13. Paul says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” On the other hand he says (30), “All do not have gifts of healings, do they? *All do not speak with tongues, do they?*” In other words, every true child of God is baptized with the H.S., but not all of them (even in the 1st Century) spoke in tongues.

So Tongues is not for a personal prayer language, it’s not for evangelism, and it’s not evidence of being baptized in the H.S. So if God did not give the gift of tongues for any of those purposes, what was tongues for? To find the answer, we need to examine 1 Cor. 14:20-25.

## **I. Tongues and Immaturity:**

1. Read v. 20

2. Here is the heart of the Corinthian problem. They were infants in true biblical thinking, but they were experts in evil. They knew all about the world, its values, style, its fads, trends, and practices and they had brought all of that stuff into the church, but when it came to bringing the word of God to bear on their lives, they were infants.

3. The irony is that while they saw themselves as the spiritual elite, they were in fact nothing more than babies. We have seen this so many times. We’ve all met people who claim to speak in tongues; they’ve had visions and unique manifestations of Jesus or Mary. They claim to have

been “slain in the Spirit” or healed of some physical malady, but when you look at the quality of their character you see all kinds of holes.

4. I’ve met people who claimed to have had all of these experiences, but they seem to not understand the most basic teaching of God’s Word on issues like divorce, drunkenness, personal integrity, laziness at work, unholy anger, foul language, sexual immorality, and abject selfishness, just to name a few. And I’m afraid what happens is that speaking in tongues (and any number of others things) becomes kind of an artificial short-cut to spirituality. They think that because they have had these experiences they have reached a higher level of maturity than those who haven’t.

5. I’ve also met people who have told me that they pray in tongues, but even though their lives may not be terribly off track, they wrongly believe that they are more mature than others because of their experience, and they are blind to the issues in their life that really need to change. Sometimes these issues are things that everyone else sees with perfect clarity, but they themselves are blind to.

6. All I’m saying is that such people are often deceived about their own spiritual maturity simply because they are able to speak unintelligible gibberish in a closet. I think that’s what Paul is trying to wake the Corinthians up to, and perhaps some of us as well.

7. So Paul is saying, “In evil (kokos) be infants. But in your thinking, be mature.”

## II. Tongues and the O.T.

1. Read v. 21

2. Verse 21 is a quotation from the book of Isaiah. Turn with me to Isaiah 28.

v. 1-3

v. 9-11

3. This is the prophet Isaiah’s message from the beginning. (Read Isaiah 5:26–29) “He will also lift up a standard to the distant nation, And will whistle for it from the ends of the earth; And behold, it will come with speed swiftly. <sup>27</sup> No one in it is weary or stumbles, None slumbers or sleeps; Nor is the belt at its waist undone, Nor its sandal strap broken. <sup>28</sup> Its arrows are sharp and all its bows are bent; The hoofs of its horses seem like flint and its *chariot* wheels like a whirlwind. <sup>29</sup> Its roaring is like a lioness, and it roars like young lions; It growls as it seizes the prey And carries *it* off with no one to deliver *it*.”

4. This is precisely what Moses told the people would happen if Israel turned her back on God. (Deut. 28:49) “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand.”

5. Nevertheless, in the end God would rescue His people and Judge the very nation he used to discipline Israel. (Read Isaiah 33:19), “You will no longer see a fierce people, A people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends, Of a stammering tongue which no one understands.”

6. How often have we seen this quotation in 1 Cor. 14:21 and breezed right on through it as if it were somehow unimportant? Beloved, it’s not unimportant! Its explanatory! Paul is telling us what speaking in tongues was about! It wasn’t about any kind of prayer language. It’s wasn’t a means of practicing evangelism. And it wasn’t an indication of the baptism of the H.S. No, the gift of tongues was really about judgment!

7. When the Jewish people heard the apostles speaking in tongues in Acts 2, they should have concluded that judgment was imminent. His judgment had once fallen on rebellious Israel (722 BC) and then on rebellious Judah (586 BC). And now, Israel had taken her rebellion to new lows. They had become so disconnected with what God was really doing among them that they had actually murdered their Messiah, and God was going to bring fierce judgment.

8. Less than 40 years after the original tongues speakers in Acts 2, and only 13 years after Paul wrote this letter to Corinth, God would raise up *NOT* Assyria or Babylon, but Rome to sweep down upon Israel and destroy the temple and the entire sacrificial system that stood at the core of all that Israel claimed to be. In fact, so severe would be the judgment that there would not be left one stone left upon another.

9. Peter’s message in Acts 2 was a message of coming judgment of God upon Israel who had nailed the Son of God to a cross by the hands of evil men. But it was also a message of grace. When the people heard Peter’s warning the people said, “What shall we do?” And Peter answered, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins” (2:37-38).

10. So you see, tongues aren’t about anything the modern charismatics say it is. It was God’s means of waking up Jewish men and women to reality of God’s threat of judgment for turning their backs on Him and murdering their Messiah.

11. That’s why Paul says (1 Cor. 14:22) “So then tongues are for a sign not to those who believe, but to unbelievers.” It was a sign. It was a warning. It was a reminder of the judgment God has promised through Moses, and then delivered once through the nation of Assyria, once through Babylon, and soon to come through Rome.

10. So on the one hand, tongues are a sign of judgment. On the other hand (in a residual kind of way) tongues were also a sign of blessing. You see, from now on, God would no longer work through a specific nation. Now he would work through the church that is made up of both Jews and Gentiles.

11. Third, it is a sign of authority. “Those who preached the judgment and promised the blessing were the apostles and prophets, whose authority was validated by “signs, wonders and

miracles” (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Rom 15:19). Among the authenticating signs was the gift of tongues. In which Paul spoke “more than all of you” (1 Cor. 14:18)” (MacArthur *1 Corinthians*; p. 383)

12. Some scholars would submit with good reason that that after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, there was no more need for tongues. They had served their purpose as a sign to unbelieving Jews that judgment was coming. Perhaps that’s why no other book in the N.T. even mentions the gift of tongues. In fact, of all the lists of spiritual gifts offered in the NT, 1 Cor. Is the only document that even mentions it. One might surmise that was because this was the place where the perversion of the gift had become a problem in the church.

13. So tongues was a sign to unbelievers. But notice what Paul says about prophesy. (v. 22) “But prophesy... not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.” Notice that the words “*is for a sign*” has been added. Paul didn’t say prophesy was “for a sign.” the gift of tongues was for a sign for unbelievers, but prophecy is for those who believe.

14. The Paul gives another hyperbolic illustration. (Read v. 23). Even if every one of you had the ability to speak with the true gift of tongues and you did it all at the same time in the assembly, what good would it be? The unbeliever would not be impressed by that! He would say you are mad! You’re all crazy!

15. On the other hand, what if every person in the assembly were able to bring the word of God to bear on the person’s life? (Read v. 24-25).

16. We see this all the time in our biblical counseling ministry. That ministry is based exclusively on the power of bringing the word of God to bear upon the lives of people - many of whom are religious unbelievers who are lost. But when they come to Calvary and people speak with them and bring God’s word to bear upon their lives, what can they concluded except that “God is certainly among you.”

17. And this brings us back to God’s purpose for all of the gifts, doesn’t it? Turn with me just briefly to Ephesians 4. (Read 4:7-16)

18. You see, beloved, the gifts of the H.S. were never designed for our own, personal, individual edification. They given to the church as a gracious gift for the purpose of making sure we would all grow up into the fullness of Christ, and that we would be protected from the many false teachings that otherwise would lead the church astray.

19. If you are a child of God, then you have spiritual gift. And that gift was especially designed by God for you to help the body of Christ grow to become all that it can be in Christ. I know the questions about tongues are not easily answered and that this topic often becomes a point of division and disunity. But let’s not let that be the case among us. God gave them to us to unify and protect. May we be found faithfully using them to that end when He comes.

20. Now, some of you are probably wondering, “If all of this is true about tongues, where did the modern tongues movement come from?” Well, we don’t have time to discuss that today, but I have included a short history at the end of my notes and you can download those from our website.

### **History of Tongues:**

Every educated Pentecostal knows when the modern tongues movement began.

1. In 1900, at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas, there was a woman named Agnes Ozman. In the years leading up to the turn of the century, some were predicting that the H.S. would going to launch a revival of Spiritual Power in the Twentieth Century. So during a service on January 1, 1901, Agnes Ozman asked for prayer and the laying on of hands to specifically ask God to fill her with the Holy Spirit. “According to her fellow students, their prayers were heard in which her colleagues reported that a halo had surrounded both her face and head and that she started speaking in the Chinese language. Not long afterward Parham [the school’s founder] and thirty four other students also began speaking in unknown languages. It is said that Ozman could not speak English for three days and was only able to write in Chinese characters" and "Many that day experienced other gifts of the Spirit, and soon the little group went off from Kansas City to share the good news" ([http://www.seeking4truth.com/agnes\\_ozman.htm](http://www.seeking4truth.com/agnes_ozman.htm))
2. The new movement was called the “Apostolic Faith.” The movement then went south to Houston where the director of the Kansas City school founded a new school. There, a young African-American preacher by the name of William Seymour joined the Apostolic movement and took it to Los Angeles, Ca. where his preaching is said to have ignited the Azusa Street Revival. This was the birth of the Pentecostal movement.
3. It is my position that the “so called” gift of tongues that occurred in 1901 was precisely the kind of ecstatic speech that the apostle Paul was condemning in 1 Corinthians. It was not the apostolic gift of tongues as described in Acts 2, nor can it rightly be identified as language.
4. Theologian, D.A. Carson writes, “To my knowledge there is universal agreement among linguists who have taped and analyzed thousands of examples of modern tongues-speaking that the contemporary phenomenon is not any human language. The patterns and structures that all known human language requires are simply not there. Occasionally a recognizable word slips out; but that is statistically likely, given the sheer quantity of verbalization” (*Showing the Spirit*; p. 83).
5. Again, Carson writes, “What about the contemporary gift of interpretation? A few years ago a friend of mine attended a charismatic service and rather cheekily recited some of John 1:1-18 in Greek as his contribution to speaking in tongues. Immediately there was an “interpretation” that bore n relation whatsoever to the Johannine prologue. Two people with the gift of interpretation

have on occasion been asked to interpret the same recorded tongues message and the resulting different and conflicting interpretations have been justified on the grounds that God gives different interpretations to different people.”

6. Continuing, he writes, “This does not prove that there is no valid, modern gift of tongues. But these distortions of interpretation are sufficiently frequent, and the interpretations themselves so commonly pedestrian, that at some point the gift of tongues must, *in some cases*, also be called into questions. The evidence is not comprehensive enough to serve as a universally damning indictment; but it is enough to provoke reflective pauses in all thoughtful believers” (Ibid, p. 87-88).

7. Between the days of the Apostles and 1901 there is virtually no historical record of the true gift of tongues (or even the false ecstatic gibberish variety) being employed in the church. George Dollar (Dallas Seminary) writes: “Some 35 years ago a distinguished American educator, Dr. George Cuttin of Colgate University took a close look at any historical instances of speaking in tongues. After his research it was Cuttin’s conclusion that in the ancient church, the church of the fathers, there was not one well attested instance of any person who exercised speaking in tongues or even pretended to exercise it.”

“Actually, speaking in tongues played no part in the Reformation movement. This should give us cause to pause and reflect. Thousands of earnest Christians all over Europe sought to re-establish earnestly and completely New Testament doctrine and holy living. Scriptures were searched diligently by some of the finest minds that the church has known. Excellent treatises were produced, outstanding creedal statements were formulated, and men set themselves to discover again the full-orbed teaching of the New Testament. Not one of these even intimated that the doctrine of speaking in tongues had a part in the continuing stream of God’s work or in the present-day activity in which the Holy Spirit directs.” ([http://www.the-highway.com/tongues\\_Dollar.html](http://www.the-highway.com/tongues_Dollar.html))

8. Dollar goes on to write: “Speaking in tongues is indeed a new thing in American Christianity. The historically informed will not need it to be repeated that in the founding days of our country our Pilgrim fathers, Puritan leaders, Baptist preachers, Presbyterian divines, and Methodist laymen did not at all indulge in this practice. They indeed did have times of great emotional conviction and were moved to show their convictions through their fervency and feelings. However, they did not feel led of the Spirit of God to demonstrate this through miracles, healing gifts, speaking in tongues, or in interpretation of tongues. Even in the strenuous days of the Great Awakening and the days of spiritual heat of the frontier revivals these things did not occur. Thousands were greatly moved, convicted of their sin and sins” but there is no evidence that they employed the sign gifts as many Pentecostals claim to do today. ([http://www.the-highway.com/tongues\\_Dollar.html](http://www.the-highway.com/tongues_Dollar.html))

9. Cleon Rogers agrees with this assessment. He writes, “After examining the testimony of the early Christian leaders whose ministry represents practically every area of the Roman Empire from approximately A.D. 100 to 400, it appears that the miraculous gifts of the first century died out and were no longer needed to establish Christianity. Furthermore, it is very evident that even if the gifts were in existence, in spite of all the testimony to the contrary, it was neither



widespread nor the normal Christian experience. The only clear reference to anything resembling the phenomena is connected with the heretic Montanus and those influenced by his erroneous views of the Spirit. All of the evidence points to the truth of Paul's prophecy when he says "tongues shall cease" (I Cor. 13:8)."

([http://www.faithfulpreaching.com/The\\_Gift\\_of\\_Tongues\\_in\\_the\\_Post\\_Apostolic\\_Church.pdf](http://www.faithfulpreaching.com/The_Gift_of_Tongues_in_the_Post_Apostolic_Church.pdf))

The links above provide a much fuller treatment of this subject and I trust you will take the time to read and study this issue for yourself. May the Lord grant you wisdom and insight as you do.

Pastor Dan Kirk