

Did you ever wonder why God gave the gift of tongues? Other miracles are easy enough to understand. We can see why God would give gifts like healing or prophecy, or giving, or teaching. But why tongues?

Some have said it's evidence of the baptism of the Spirit, but we found in ch.12 that that is clearly not true (all Christians have been baptized in the Spirit, but not all speak in tongues).

Some say it's for evangelism, some say it has a devotional purpose...there are numerous theories. But the Bible doesn't say any of that.

The only direct statement we find in Scripture regarding the purpose of this gift is in this passage —and it's not what you might think.

We come this morning to the most difficult verse in the whole book. Interpreters have wrestled and struggled to understand this verse for 2000 years.

The problem is that in v.22 Paul says that tongues are a sign for unbelievers, not believers – but then goes on in the very next verse to point out how unbelievers react negatively against tongues (they think you are out of your mind).

He also says prophecy is for believers and not for unbelievers, and then immediately goes on to give an example of how unbelievers react positively toward prophecy.

The problem is so difficult, that when J.B. Phillips made his translation of the NT, he did major surgery here and just changed v.22 around so it said the opposite of what the Greek actually says.

Then in a footnote he says, “This is the sole instance of the translator’s departing from the accepted text. He felt bound to conclude, from the sense of the next three verses, that we have here either a slip of the pen on the part of Paul, or, more probably, a copyist’s errors.”

#### The Role of the Mind

Our worship should be thought through enough so that others can say, “amen.”

#### Consider the Effect of What You Do

**20 Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.**

Children do things without thinking them through. A little kid might see his dad pushing a lawnmower around the yard, and he gets his little toy mower and pushes it around the yard.

The father has a reason for doing what he is doing. He's accomplishing some purpose. But the child doesn't do what he does to make the lawn look better or to accomplish anything. He just does the action because he likes it.

It's characteristic of children to prefer the amusing to the useful. They love anything that shines or moves or makes a noise.

That's the way the Corinthians were with gifts. They thought tongues were really neat, so they were doing that in the worship service without giving any thought to the purpose of tongues.

So Paul says, “You need to have a reason for the things you do in the service. Think like adults, not children.” And then he goes on to explain to them the purpose of tongues.

**21 In the Law it is written:**

**"Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not (Paul changes the past to a future) listen to me," says the Lord.**

Paul is quoting Isa.28:11, but to understand it we need to go back further than that, because Isaiah is quoting Moses.

TT Dt.28

It would probably be a good idea to highlight this chapter or circle it or something in your Bible, or to do something that will remind you that this is an especially important chapter in the Bible.

There are a whole bunch of things all through the Bible that you will understand better if you know about this chapter.

It's the Blessings and Cursings chapter. And it's extremely easy to summarize.

God has just given the whole law to Israel a second time. He gave it once when Moses came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments in Exodus (right after they got out of Egypt – before the 40 years of wandering), and then at the end of those 40 years, just before the new generation goes into the Promised Land, Moses gives them the law a second time, complete with detailed explanations as to what it means.

The second giving of the law is called *deuteo* (second) *nomos* (law) – hence Deuteronomy.

In the first few chapters there is a little history, and then 20 some chapters of law (= stipulations of the covenant between God and Israel – their “end of the deal”)

God communicated that covenant in some very familiar terms to those people – it was in the form of a Suzerain-Vassal treaty.

In those days, when a king (suzerain) conquered another people, they would become his vassals (they would belong to him). And they developed a very workable system in which they would make a treaty or covenant that served both sides.

On the king's side, his responsibility would be to protect them from enemies, and to govern them. In return, he demanded one thing: loyalty.

The treaty would be written out with all the specifics of what the king regarded as proper expressions of loyalty to him. Those were the stipulations of the covenant.

God took the language from those treaties and used it to present the Mosaic law. In doing that He was telling the people that this was a Suzerain-Vassal treaty. He would promise to care for Israel, and in return Israel would be loyal only to Him, and the terms of that loyalty were the specifics of the Law.

So after 20+ chapters of those stipulations (their end of the deal), we finally get to ch.28. Chapter 28 describes God's end of the deal.

And as I said, it's very easy to summarize. All it says is this: “Demonstrate your loyalty by following these laws, and I'll bless you at every turn. Become disloyal, and I'll curse you at every turn.”

The first 14 verses are the blessing part. Then the cursing section. After a long section describing disobedience and the resulting curses, v.45 **All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the LORD your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. 46 They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. 47 **Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose tongue you will not understand, 50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. 51 They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed...****

So tongues is something that was established right at the outset of God's covenant with Israel. It was established way back as a sign and a wonder reminding Israel they are being cursed for disloyalty to the covenant with God.

The creation of foreign languages itself was a judgment in the first place (Gn.10 – tower of Babel). It used to be everyone spoke the same language, and then, in an act of judgment, God gave them different languages for the purpose of alienating the people from one another.

TT Isa.28

Now we jump ahead 7 or 8 centuries to the time when the leaders of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were all drunk and idolatrous and headed for judgment.

So Isaiah cries out against their sin and calls them to repentance. And in response they just mock Isaiah, which is usually what happens when a person isn't repentant.

Be ready for that. When you confront someone with sin, 9 times out of 10 if the person doesn't repent they will justify themselves by turning on you.

Even though you are speaking for God (like Isaiah was), their anger will not be directed at God but at you.

Isa.28:9-13

**9 "Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast?**

**10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there."**

**do and do, rule on rule** are guesses as to what these words mean. In the Hebrew it sounds this way: "Sav lasav, sav lasave, kav lakav, kav lakav, z'ev sham, z'ev sham."

Whatever those words mean (if anything), the point is the same – they were mocking Isaiah by saying his teaching is infantile.

"We're adults. You don't have to talk to use about your little rules and dos and don'ts. We know what we are doing. We're not babies."

"Isaiah your teaching is just repetitive, basic stuff for spiritual babies, and we are advanced way beyond that. We understand complex principles and deep things about God."

It's amazing how ingenious people get when they want to justify sin. You take a simple verse that says, "Do not commit adultery" and they say, "Oh you have to understand the dispensational parameters of that..."

And the next thing you know they are taking you over the Bible and picking up little phrases here and there and piecing it all together in a huge, complex doctrine that they can't articulate clearly, but it allows whatever they are doing.

And Isaiah says, "No, the Bible says don't worship idols. So stop worshipping idols. You shouldn't be worshipping idols, because God doesn't permit people to worship idols."

**11 Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, 12 to whom he said, "This is the resting place, let the weary rest";and, "This is the place of repose"--but they would not listen. 13 So then, the word of the LORD to them will become: *Sav lasav, sav lasave, kav lakav, kav lakav, z'ev sham, z'ev sham* --so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured.**

God makes the punishment fit the crime. "You think my words are baby talk? The meaningless babbling of an infant? I'll give you babbling – how about some Assyrian babbling?"

"You don't like Isaiah's approach? Too simple? Too elementary for you? Next time I'll send judgment in a form you can't understand at all. You'll be happy to know you won't understand a single word the Assyrians are saying as they cut you to pieces."

So judgment comes in connection with tongues the people don't understand.

**Jer.5:15 O house of Israel," declares the LORD, "I am bringing a distant nation against you-- an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand.**

And restoration comes when those tongues are removed.

Isa.33 talks about what will happen in the Kingdom for the righteous:

**17 Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.**

**18 In your thoughts you will ponder the former terror: "Where is that chief officer? Where is the one who took the revenue?... (When you get to the Kingdom, your first thought will be, "What ever happened to the IRS anyway?)**

**19 You will see those arrogant people no more, those people of an obscure speech, with their strange, incomprehensible tongue. (Isa.33:17-19)**

Back to 1 Co.14:22

So tongues are a sign of judgment. Any time God cuts you off from understanding His Word, it's a fearful act of irreversible judgment.

**22 Tongues, then, are a sign,**

This phrase appears 10 times in the LXX (Gn.9:13, Ex.13:16, Num.16:38, Dt.6:8, 11:18, Josh.4:6, Isa.19:20,55:13, Ez.20:12,20:20). It refers to something that serves as an illustration, announcement or reminder.

**not for believers but for unbelievers;**

Tongues were not a warning that if you don't repent, you may face judgment. Tongues were a sign that judgment is now in progress. It's here. The foreign army is already at your house. Your army is already defeated, your wall breached...

So it's not a call to repentance as much as an announcement that you failed to repent.

Is that really the message we want to send to people who visit the church? God's irreversible judgment has fallen on you. There is no hope left for you. God has nothing left to say to you."?

And not only to unbelievers, but to each other – when I speak in unintelligible language to you, I'm making a foreigner of you, alienating you, and announcing to you that you are being judged by God.

The Corinthians thought tongues were a sign – a miracle, that was meant for believers in the worship service. Maybe they figured they were proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul says, "No, they are intended as a sign for unbelievers." And it's not a positive sign, but a negative one, because anytime God communicates to you in a way you can't understand you know you are being judged.

(That's not to say you are being judged if He communicates in a way *hard* to understand – only if He communicates in a way that is *impossible* to understand.)

**prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.**

Prophecy is God's Word to God's people. It's not addressed to the world, but to Christians.

When an unbeliever picks up a Bible and starts reading it, he's reading *our* mail. If he thinks he can claim any of those promises in there, he's wrong. The only thing that applies to him is the call to repent.

That's why when I preach, I realize there are unbelievers who are here from time to time – maybe every week, but I'm not talking to them. I'm talking to you.

**23 So if the whole church comes together**

The NIV doesn't translate the whole phrase, but in the Greek it says **So if the whole church comes together in the same place...**

That's how Paul envisioned the worship service. This is a good reminder for those who can't find a church they can get along with, and so they just stay home and call it a home church.

The word "church" means "assembly," and the point is to assemble with a community of believers. Scripture never refers

to ones household in that way (even though back then the household often included more than just the family).

**and everyone speaks in tongues**

(Not that that is possible - In ch.12 Paul made it clear that not all have tongues.) But hypothetically, if the Corinthians' dreams came true and *everyone* had that gift and everyone used it...

**and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?**

You need to know that the phrase **out of your mind** did not have the pejorative meaning then that it has now. They are not accusing them of mental defect or illness or insanity.

They used the phrase literally. In the mystery religions that were so prevalent in Corinth at the time, one goal of worship was to attain an altered state of consciousness (just like some of the extreme Charismatics churches today).

And so the whole goal of worship was to be elevated out of your mind into a higher state of ecstasy.

So Paul is saying, "Unbelievers will come in and see you all doing that and say, 'Oh, I guess this is just another one of the mystery religions like Dionysius or Cybele...'" which was just one more consumer option on the pluralistic religious market of the time.

**24 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand (a "newbie") comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.**

How's that for seeker sensitive? Did you know there are books by the truckload out there explaining how you can manage to set up your worship service so that when unbelievers come in they won't be convicted or feel judged by anyone, and their secrets will remain secret?

That's the whole goal of the seeker approach – make the Christian experience feel safe and non-threatening.

The seeker model is not just a minor difference in style. It is an attempt to circumvent the very purpose of the assembly of God's people!

This is not talking about some kind of fortune telling trick where you tell them secrets about their lives that no one else could know.

More likely it's something like Ro.1-3, which strips away all human pretensions of righteousness, and lays the sinful soul bare before God. (Hays)

God's Word does that. Just a couple weeks ago I preached a sermon on Revelation 2 and afterward someone told me that it was a little awkward, because he had been counseling a friend, and that friend told him a bunch of things in confidence.

That friend wasn't here, but this guy said, "When my friend hears the tape, he's going to think I told you all the things he shared with me in confidence!"

That kind of thing happens all the time. I can't tell you how many times I preach about something and afterward someone says, "#1 How did you know? And #2 I can't believe you preached a whole sermon about me! Next time why don't you just address me in person."

We still have those prophecies preserved today in written form – the NT (2 Pe.1:19-21). So when the Gospel is proclaimed, and it brings repentance, here's what it looks like:

First, a person is convinced **that he is a sinner**

That's all one word. It's the same word in Mt.18 used to describe step one (NIV – **show him his fault**).

It means to expose guilt – to make it clear that there is no question whatsoever as to whether or not there is real guilt.

This puts not only the sin but the fact that I'm guilty right out on the table in clear daylight, so that there is no arguing it.

**and will be judged by all**

This word means to thoroughly examine. The truth of God's Word probes every nook and cranny of your heart, and leaves

no stone unturned.

So the repentant sinner never says, "You don't know the whole story God. There are mitigating factors..."

Maybe we don't know the whole story, but God's Word researches your heart and turns up the whole story. The rest of the story never nullifies what the Bible says.

If a man commits adultery, and things, "There are so many things you don't know about me, so many other factors from my past – you just don't know what it's like for me..."

I may not know any of that, but that doesn't limit God's Word. If God's Word says adultery is always wrong, then it's wrong in your case, period.

**25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.**  
(lit. **the deep things of your heart will be made manifest**)

Those things that are way down deep inside your heart – the subtle motives and things you are hardly aware of. The ugly things you have stuffed way, way down so no one will ever see them again, including yourself...

God's Word has a way of pulling those thing up, and laying them right out in the open daylight.

You have some ugliness in your heart, and it's so ugly you just don't want to deal with it, so you file it somewhere down in the deepest recesses of your being.

But at the beginning of the repentance process, God's Word dredges those things up and puts them right in front of your face and forces you to deal with them.

"But how do I deal with them?"

**So he will fall down and worship God**

Falling down in worship is a mark of humility before God. No more secrets, no more excuses, no more hiding...

The garbage of my heart is now right here lying all over the table. It is intolerably repulsive and disgusting, and I am desperate to be rid of it.

And at the same time it's obvious that I don't have the power to do anything about it, because these things are part of who I am, and all that's left is to collapse before God in repentance.

**So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"**

In Isa.45:14 God is describing what the Kingdom will be like someday when He fulfills all His promises to Israel: **"The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans--they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.'"**

**Zech.8:22-23 And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him." 23 This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'"**

**Isa 49:23 Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed."**

**Isa.60:10-16 "Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion. 11 Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations--their kings led in triumphal procession. 12 For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. 13 "The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary; and I will glorify the place of my feet. 14 The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. 15 "Although you have been**

**forsaken and hated, with no one traveling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations. 16 You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at royal breasts. Then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.**

So the clear, understandable proclamation of God's Word in the Church accomplishes the great, end-times conversion of the nations (or at least a foretaste of that final event). (Hayes)

“But I thought prophecy was directed at believers!”

It is. That's the great thing about this. Churches sometimes agonize over trying to decide whether to target the preaching to Christians or non-Christians. “Should we preach Christian living sermons, or should we preach evangelistic sermons?”

And what they don't realize is the most evangelistic thing we can do in the church is when unbelievers come in, give them that which is intended for believers.

I preach an evangelistic sermon every Sunday. When we went through Colossians 3 and I preached on principles of a Christian marriage – that's evangelistic.

Is Colossians 3 part of the NT? Then it's part of the Gospel.

It lays out God's description of holy living, and that will strike at the heart of an unbeliever, and convict him of the sin of falling short of that, and producing a longing to know that righteousness.

In fact, the very fact that Paul spends 20 verses talking about how uninterpreted tongues doesn't edify the body, and then 5 quick verses at the end about how it's not helpful for evangelizing the lost tells us a lot about where our priorities are to be.

So if you are concerned with the presence of God being evident in worship, the way to bring that about is through the Holy Spirit revealing the secrets of people's hearts through prophecy – not through miracles or supernatural phenomena.

If someone does a Sunday School class on Romans 1-3 (the wrath of God over the sinfulness of man), it may seem dry, depending on how it is presented it may come off a little stale or stodgy...

But if someone comes away convicted of sin, that is a far greater indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit than if everyone in the church were doing miracles.