

Spiritual Gifts #9

INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

Read 1 Corinthians 14:1-5, 12, 13, 26-28

Praying in tongues

In the last study, we saw the value of personal prayer in tongues.

The following is an extract from a young woman who implemented the *10/5 program* (ie praying with the spirit ten minutes a day five days a week.)

Day one: At times I started to doubt whether I'd last for ten minutes. And I started to wonder if I was making words up. Then I found my vocabulary change. New sounds and patterns formed. I got excited and I didn't want to stop in case I'd miss out on something! So yeh... I went over my ten minutes. And my quiet time with God afterwards was so cool!

Day 2: I started to cry about 7 minutes into it! (I thought maybe this is what 'groans that words cannot express' sound like?) I prayed for 30mins more till I became silent.

Now I've been struggling with a sin that I committed a while ago. It's something that's been consuming me and affecting all areas of my walk with God and my entire life. After or during praying in tongues, I felt convicted to go to my growth group leader and tell her about this and she prayed for me and encouraged me. And I felt so free afterwards! It made me realise the realness of one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit, which is to liberate us from our past and from habitual sins which we don't feel that we can escape from.

Day 3: Today I was struggling with bitterness, jealousy and hurt... So I decided to start praying in tongues. As I began to pray, I felt the Holy Spirit minister to me. We learn how He was sent to be our counsellor. Now I was actually experiencing it! He was helping me and comforting me and guiding me in my thoughts. As I prayed, my focus shifted from bitterness against this particular person and focused on the beauty and amazing features of the gift of tongues!

Earlier today, I also found that praying in tongues has also made me more aware of the presence of God in me. It's so comforting and reassuring to know that the Holy Spirit is interceding for me. I feel so much peace in me at the moment.

Wow... all these revelations and everything... and this is just from making a point to pray for at least 10 minutes a day! I don't know why I didn't start this earlier...

I'm hoping to keep up the 10/5 program. If all this has happened in three days, I'm interested to see what might happen in 30 days... or 3 months... or 3 years. This has really helped me to 'fix my thoughts' on Jesus rather than focusing on myself.

Three foundational principles

- Eagerly desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:31; 14:1). Don't indifferent or unresponsive to this biblical command
- Do everything to build up the church (14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). No gift should be used for selfish reasons such as to inflate one's ego or to enhance one's own position
- Do everything decently and in order (14:33, 40). There is no place for wild, unrestrained or fanatical behaviour. Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit.

Definition

A gift of interpretation conveys the essential message of an utterance in tongues through translation, interpretation or explanation.

- *Hermeneuo* = translate, explain, interpret
- Reflects both the content and the spirit of the tongue
- It is a gift of the Holy Spirit used by faith (1 Cor 12:10, 11)

1/The need for interpretation

- Public use of tongues is of little value without an interpretation (14:1-11)
- Like unstructured music or an uncertain trumpet sound (7, 8)
- With an interpretation, an utterance in a tongue is similar in value to a prophecy

Questions

If tongues and interpretation are the same as a prophecy, why not just prophesy?

- Tongues and interpretation provide a more obvious ‘sign’
- Tongues and interpretation enable more people to participate in ministry
- Tongues and interpretation involve teamwork
- An utterance in tongues may require less faith than a prophecy (hence a good place to start)

If tongues are addressed to God, and prophecy to man, how can tongues and interpretation be similar to prophecy?

- The equality is one of value
- An interpretation may be a prayer or an explanation of the meaning or message of the prayer
- *Hermeneuo* may mean explain or interpret, not just translate.

Why is there sometimes a discrepancy in length between a tongue and an interpretation?

- God uses us as we are – some are condensers, some are amplifiers! The Spirit does not change our personality when we use a gift such as interpretation.
- Compare Daniel’s interpretation of Belshazzar’s vision (Daniel chapter 5). There were only 4 Hebrew words given to Belshazzar. Daniel’s explanation takes many more words, in both Hebrew and English. Eg
 - ✦ NIV 35
 - ✦ RSV 35
 - ✦ NASB 34
 - ✦ NKJ 30
 - ✦ ESV 35
 - ✦ Amplified Bible 120

2/The nature of interpretation

Read 1 Cor. 14:13-19 (ESV)

- We should pray for an interpretation, either by oneself or by another (13)
- We should determine to pray with both understanding and spirit (15)
- A tongue may be either spoken or sung (15)

- Tongue speaking = blessing and giving thanks (16, 17)
- But an outsider or uninformed person [Greek: *idiotes*] might not understand (16)
- Paul speaks in tongues more than anyone (18)
- But in church he would rather speak five words to instruct people than 10 000 they do not understand.

3/The sign of tongues

- Tongue-speaking is a sign to unbelievers (20-25)
- But like the Assyrian language to Israel, it is a sign that is often rejected
- Sometimes rejection occurs because of abuse of the gift (23)

Question

What about praying or singing together in tongues?

- Similar to people from several nations praying/singing together in their own languages. As long as they are not trying to be heard above everyone else this is acceptable and often happens in multi-cultural meetings.
- Is it edifying? Are people encouraged or built up through it?
- Is it being done decently and in order? Passion and emotion are godly manifestations, but emotionalistic or unrestrained behaviour is not acceptable.
- Are unbelievers present? Will they be impressed? Offended?
- Is one person trying to dominate? Then there should be an interpretation.

4/A vibrant church

When the Corinthians met many things happened (26) including—

- Hymns
- Teaching
- Revelation
- Tongues
- Interpretation
- Prophecy (implied)
- Paul did not forbid any of these—he just wanted to regulate them

5/Regulations

Read: 1 Corinthians 14:26-33

- Only two or three should speak in tongues.
- One person should interpret each utterance in tongues.
- Only two or three prophecies should speak in a given service
- These are indefinite guidelines expressing a principle rather than a binding rule
- The rest (of the prophets? Of the church?) should evaluate what is said

6/Three principles

Read 1 Cor. 14:30-33

While the Spirit gives the gifts, it is up us to use them properly (as with any gift). If we cannot control them, then 1 Cor 14 is redundant.

- Proper manners (30, 31) – be courteous, be thoughtful. Note that the concept of courtesy mentioned by Paul is the exact reverse of how we would do it today—the principle is what matters
- Proper control (32) – length, emotion, expression, grammar are all under our control
- Proper order (33, 40) – not wild or disorderly

7/Challenge

In all things excel in building up or edifying the church (3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26)

- Excel = abound or overflow
- This may mean being silent at times, where a prophetic utterance would not be helpful (eg interrupting an altar call or a sermon or speaking out in a congregation where such things are not appreciated)
- It may mean speaking out at others, where a prophetic utterance is needful (eg to stir people up, to awaken faith, to encourage a discouraged group of people)

Challenge

- Cell group leaders – cells offer the best opportunity for use of gifts
- Singers – prophetic music is powerful
- All – ‘eagerly desire spiritual gifts’
- This is not an option – it is a biblical command
- *Many of us have never even considered the possibility that we could do it. We need to enlarge our thinking, release our imagination, expand our concepts. What if the Spirit did work through us?*
- When we step out (in faith), God steps in (with power)!

SOMETHING TO THINK OR TALK ABOUT

Read: 1 Cor 14:1-40

Biblical

1. Why would Paul rather have us prophesy than speak in tongues? (5)
2. In what would Paul have us excel? (12)
3. How often in this passage does Paul refer to building up the church?
4. What are reasons for interpreting tongues? (5, 11, 16, 17, 18)
5. To which spirit is Paul referring in 14, 15 – the Holy Spirit or the human spirit? How do we know?
6. Mark the following True or False and give the relevant verse reference (13-19)--
 - a. It is inappropriate to interpret one’s own utterance in tongues
 - b. Paul hardly ever spoke in tongues
 - c. Paul thought that tongues was a poor way to give thanks
 - d. In church Paul preferred to speak a known language than to speak in tongues
 - e. Paul preferred his own language so he could pray better
7. On what basis should we decide which are the best things to do when we meet together? (26)

Personal and practical

8. How can v.12 work out in practice?

9. Have you ever spoken publicly in tongues or given an interpretation? Describe what happened.
10. In what ways should do you think 14:32 be implemented and applied to tongues and interpretation?
11. To what extent would verse 26 describe your cell group? What can you do about it?
12. Memorise verse 12

Pray

Heavenly Father, I would love to have spiritual gifts functioning more often in my life. As I seek for them eagerly, I pray that you will open doors for them to be expressed through me so that others may be built up and encouraged. In Jesus name, amen.

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