**Bible Study The Gifts of the Holy Spirit part 4, 29th June 2023**

Last week we had a look at the four purposes of speaking in tongues:

1. Evidence that someone has been filled with the Holy Spirit (**Acts 2.4; 10.45-46; 19.6**).
2. On certain occasions, when the language was understood by someone else, it was a sign to unbelievers. This is what happened on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2.4-8**).
3. A prayer language given by the Holy Spirit which can be used in private. a) When someone prays in tongues, he prays with his spirit rather than with the mind.  
   b) When someone prays in tongues he edifies/build up himself (**1 Cor. 14.4).**
4. A public utterance which is interpreted and so the church is edified (**1 Cor. 14.5, 6-13**).

That is what we are going to look at this evening: the gift of “interpretation of tongues” (**1 Cor. 12.10**).  
It is the Holy Spirit Who give the gifts “as He wills” (**1 Cor. 12.11**) but we are told, for our part, to “earnestly desire” the spiritual gifts (**1 Cor. 14.1**) and those who “speak in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret” (**1 Cor. 14.13**).

When we look at the other seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, there are examples of them being used in the Old Testament and in the ministry of Jesus. However, the gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues were not given until the Holy Spirit was outpoured on the day of Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles gives us several examples of people who spoke in tongues but only one possible example of the gift of interpretation of tongues being used. In **Acts 10.46**, when Cornelius and those in his house were filled with the Spirit, Peter and those accompanying him “heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God”. (Cp. Acts 2.11 – when they spoke in tongues on the day of Pentecost they were telling “the mighty works of God”.) For Luke to be able to report that they were “extolling God” presumably either Peter or one of his companions must have been able to interpret what was being said but we are not given any more details.

So, our main source of information about this gift is 1 Corinthians Ch. 14.  
Read **1 Cor. 14.1-13**. Paul’s main aim is to stress the importance of using the spiritual gifts for the edification of others. As we saw last week, one of the purposes of speaking in tongues is to edify yourself. However, when we come together as the body of Christ our aim should be to edify the church.   
In **1 Cor. 12.7** the various gifts are described as manifestations of the Spirit “for the common good”. The Greek word translated “manifestation” is phanerosis which means “something which is made visible”. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible; but we can see the effects of the wind. The invisible wind is manifested when it makes wind turbines spin around, and as they spin they generate electricity. Similarly, the invisible Holy Spirit is manifested through spiritual gifts which edify the church.

In **1 Cor. 14v16-19** Paul makes the point that speaking in tongues without an interpretation doesn’t edify anyone else and in a public gathering he would rather speak five words that are understood than 10,000 in a tongue! This is why he says in **v13** that we should pray for the gift of interpretation.

Last week I read several accounts of times when people have spoken in tongues when someone who knew the language was present and able to understand what they were saying. Due to the large number of languages in the world such occasions are quite rare. This is why the gift of interpretation of tongues is so important.

David Petts defines this gift as “The supernatural ability, imparted by the Holy Spirit, to interpret a language that neither the speaker nor the interpreter has ever learned”. (Body builders p.126)

First of all, it is important to state that this gift is “interpretation” of tongues rather than “translation” of tongues. The Greek word is hermeneuo (from which we get our word hermeneutics) means “to explain the meaning of words in a different language”.  
e.g. We are very fortunate to have several English “versions” of the Bible. Some of them are translations which try and translate the Hebrew and Greek word for word as closely as possible, for example: KJV, RSV, ESV.  
Others are paraphrases which convey the overall meaning of a passage, for example: Good News, Living Bible, The Message.

Compare these two versions of the same passage:  
Ecclesiastes 12.1-5 - English Standard Version (ESV):  
**12**Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”; **2**before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, **3**in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed, **4**and the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— **5**they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+12.1-5&version=ESV#fen-ESV-17529a)] and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.

Ecclesiastes 12.1-5 – Good News Bible:  
**12**So remember your Creator[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+12.1-5&version=GNT#fen-GNT-18756a)] while you are still young, before those dismal days and years come when you will say, “I don't enjoy life.” **2**That is when the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars will grow dim for you, and the rain clouds will never pass away. **3**Then your arms, that have protected you, will tremble, and your legs, now strong, will grow weak. Your teeth will be too few to chew your food, and your eyes too dim to see clearly. **4**Your ears will be deaf to the noise of the street. You will barely be able to hear the mill as it grinds or music as it plays, but even the song of a bird will wake you from sleep. **5**You will be afraid of high places, and walking will be dangerous. Your hair will turn white; you will hardly be able to drag yourself along, and all desire will be gone. We are going to our final resting place, and then there will be mourning in the streets.

This shows the difference between a literal translation and a paraphrase.

When someone interprets tongues it is not a word for word translation but it gives the meaning of what has been said in tongues. This explains why sometimes there may be a short utterance in tongues and a longer interpretation or a long utterance in tongues and a shorter interpretation.

Read **1 Cor. 14.26-28**Paul says that there should be a maximum of three people who speak in tongues in a meeting and it should be “each in turn” rather than at the same time.  
**v27** “and let one interpret” - Some people take this to mean that if there are two or three utterances in tongues, the same person gives the interpretation to each of them. Another way of interpreting this (my view and also that of David Petts, Body Builders p.133) is that only one person should interpret each utterance in tongues. In other words, rather than one person interpreting and then someone else giving their interpretation and then another person giving their interpretation – one interpretation of each utterance is sufficient.

Another area where there are different views is whether an interpretation should be directed towards the people in the church or towards God.  
**1 Cor.14.2** - someone who speaks in tongues “speaks not to men but to God”.  
Tongues is also described as prayer and thanksgiving (**1 Cor.14.14-17**) and speaking “to God” (**v28**).   
In these instances, tongues was directed towards God. Those who take this view also point to the day of Pentecost when those who spoke in tongues were telling “the mighty works of God” and **Acts 10.46** where those who were filled with the Spirit were “speaking in tongues and extolling God”. They say that in these instances tongues was praise which was a directed to God.

However, as we have already seen, speaking in tongues has four different purposes. The verses above relate to occasions when people were first filled with the Spirit or to the private use of tongues. It is possible that if God inspires someone to speak in tongues out loud in a public meeting in order for it to be interpreted, that God could give them a message for the church.  
Also, in **Acts 2.11** and **10.46**, the phrases “telling … the mighty works of God” and “extolling God” could just as easily be directed towards the people listening as to God.  
It is also interesting that the prophesy from **Joel 2.28-29** which Peter quotes on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2.17-18**) as a fulfilment of what had just happened says “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (**v17**). In **v 18** Peter adds “and they shall prophesy” - words which are not part of Joel’s prophesy. It would seem, then, that when those speaking in tongues were “telling… the mighty works of God” that Peter is describing it as prophesying.

In the book “Spoken by the Spirit” p.57 Ralph Harris gives an example of Howard Carter giving an interpretation in tongues which was manward and was understood by someone present.  
Ralph Harris also gives several examples of someone speaking in tongues and being understood by someone who speaks that language e.g. p.68 where a man who was under anaesthetic preached the Gospel in Hebrew.

It is probably best not to take a hard and fast stance either way on this one. When someone speaks in tongues it may be prayer, it may be praise or it may be a message to a church or individual. The important thing is that by someone giving an interpretation of tongues the church is edified.

So, interpretation of tongues is an important gift. If we already speak in tongues we are specifically told to pray for this gift. As with all the spiritual gifts, giving an interpretation in tongues involves taking a step of faith.