

## 1Cor.12:10 "Gift of Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues"

The gift of tongues is one of those gifts which has been surrounded by controversy in the church for many years. Many of the main-line denominations believe that the gift of tongues was an apostolic gift which meant that it was only necessary in the church during the time of the apostles to kick-start the church.

As a result, many of those denominations do not promote this gift because they deny its existence for today. On the other end of the spectrum, all of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches believe in and promote the gift of tongues.

We at Calvary Chapel fall into the latter category which I believe is a biblical position on the gift of tongues. However, unlike many of our Pentecostal and Charismatic brethren, we teach a balanced biblical position on the use of this gift as the Spirit has revealed its use in the word of God.

So, let's jump right into this area. The word tongues in the N.T. is *glossa* in the Greek. And as with all languages, many words can mean different things depending on the context.

If I told you that the Dolphins **blew out** the Buffalo Bills in last week's game, you would understand that to mean that the Dolphins defeated the Bills with a commanding lead.

However, if I told you that I **blew out** the candles on my birthday cake you would understand that to mean I extinguished the candles as I literally blew on them.

The word tongue in the Greek can also mean different things depending on the context. We read in JAM 3:5 "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark."

Here the tongue *glossa* is that organ just inside your mouth which gives you the ability to speak.

Over in the book of Acts we find another use of the word *glossa* or tongue. We read in ACT 2:3 "They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them."

Here the word *glossa* or tongues is not a physical part of the body, but is an expression describing a phenomenon of the Spirit descending upon the believers.

But the next verse in ACT 2:4 says, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other *tongues* as the Spirit enabled them."

And so here the word *glossa* or tongue describes the language a person might use as his physical tongue is engaged to speak. And it's this last description which we're concerned with this morning as we look into a gift of the Holy Spirit which enables a believer in Christ Jesus to speak in a language which that person never before learned.

We'll discover what this gift is used for in the Body of Christ and how it must be properly understood according to the word of God.

The first time we see this gift spoken of in the in the N.T. is when Jesus addressed it in the gospel of Mark.

MAR 16:15-17 "He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. 17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; ***they will speak in new tongues;...***"

Here the word tongues, which is *glossa* in the Greek, infers new languages. Jesus means to say that one of the signs that will accompany faith in Christ is that some will speak in new languages which is not natural to their ability to communicate.

Now, some have misunderstood Jesus' words in Mark and have concluded that every believer will be able to drive out demons; every believer will be able to speak in a new tongue; and that every believer, according to MAR 16:18, "will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

This is not what Jesus is teaching as Paul will explain in his letter to the Corinthians, as he describes that it is the Spirit who gives gifts according to His will, and that not everyone will have the exact same gifts. We are a Body made up of many members.

But Jesus' prophecy was in fact fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, because you see, Jesus was referring to the outpouring of the Spirit which was spoken of through the Prophet Joel.

JOE 2:28-29 "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."

And it is this portion of Scripture in the O.T. which Peter quotes in describing what was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke with other languages. And it is on the day of Pentecost when for the first time the gift of tongues is given by the Spirit.

ACT 2:4-8 "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. 5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. 6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? 8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

There were many different people in Jerusalem that day from different parts of the world who spoke different languages other than Hebrew or Greek. And as the disciples were filled with the Spirit they began speaking in the languages of these people.

Some disciples spoke in the language of the Parthians, some spoke in the language of the Medes and some in the language of the Elamites and others spoke the languages of the residents of the Mesopotamians and so on. At least fifteen different areas of the world are mentioned and probably different dialects within those regions.

Some have suggested that the disciples were speaking their own language and that the miracle was in the hearing so that these people heard them speak in their own language. I don't believe this to be the case. Peter understood what was going on because he heard it as well when he defended the disciples who were accused of being drunk as they babbled in these different languages.

He responded in ACT 2:15-17 "These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams."

The "all people" in ACT 2:17 is understood to mean all those whom God comes upon with His Spirit whom we are told are those who are His servants, those who believe. The crowd, up to this point, had not believed. The gift of the Spirit is placed upon those who are indwelt with the Spirit; believing Christians.

The Spirit had come upon the disciples and enabled them to fulfill Joel's prophecy as they were able to speak in an unlearned language. The crowd simply heard their own language as it was spoken.

Some may argue that this would be next to impossible for this vast crowd gathered around to understand the disciples who were each speaking a different language. However, this is not really that unusual. If you were in a crowd of people, all speaking an unknown language, and one of them began to speak in English guess who you'd tune in to and recognize what they were saying?

This was the case in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and what amazed the people was that they knew these disciples were not learned men who were able to know these different languages. Peter says, 'that's right, this is a work of the Holy Spirit according to the word of God foretold by Joel.'

And for you and me this is essential to understand when it comes to this gift in our lives. Whether it's the gift of discernment or the gift of tongues or any other gift, it is the Spirit who must give it.

In describing the different gifts of the Spirit in 1Cor.12:11, Paul says, "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines."

A gift is just that, a gift. We don't earn it or deserve it. And though we may ask for gifts from God, which is certainly proper, it is ultimately up to the Holy Spirit who determines who He will give certain gifts to. More often than not the Holy Spirit gifts you even before you ask.

This is why some Pentecostals, who insist that the evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit must be the speaking in tongues, are absolutely wrong. Some get the gift and some don't. Paul uses rhetorical reasoning when he assumes that not everyone will have the same gifts.

1CO 12:29-30 "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?"

What do you suppose the implied answer is? No, not everyone in the Body of Christ will be an apostle; no, not everyone in the Body will work miracles or have gifts of healing; and no, not all will speak in tongues.

To suggest that "the evidence" for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an unknown tongue is to miss "the most important" evidence of the Spirit's work which is not a particular gift, but the fruit of the Spirit which every believer is called upon to exhibit.

That's where Paul was going when he wrote in 1CO 12:31 "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

It is the love of Christ shed abroad in our hearts which is to be the evidence of the Spirit's work in our lives, because *agape* love will not glory in any particular gift, it will reach out to others with the love of Christ found in the gospel of our Lord which is the power unto salvation, while bringing glory to the Gift-Giver, Jesus Himself.

To place a spiritual gift, which will one day be taken away at the consummation of Christ's plan, at the forefront of our lives, as the evidence, once again puts "us" in the spot light instead of Christ, whose love will never come to an end.

And so simply because you do not presently have the gift of tongues does not necessarily mean you have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit. I wish I could convey to you how many people I've known over the years who have been devastated because some misguided "Christian" told them they didn't have the Spirit because they didn't speak in tongues.

Paul makes it clear. Some do speak in tongues and some don't. I for one will rest on the word of God any day, rather than be discouraged by someone who feels that their particular gift of tongues is the litmus test for spirituality. May I remind you that many in the Corinthian Church had the gift of tongues being exercised in their community and yet Paul rebukes them for being immature in the faith; not exercising the fruit of the Spirit.

Spiritual maturity is never measured by how much someone practices a particular gift, it is measured by how much you love Christ above all, and your neighbor as yourself. Remember, "If I

...speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." (1CO 13:1)

By the way, I might add that if you do not have the "gift" of tongues and you desire to, you can certainly come to God and ask.

But what's the purpose of this gift of tongues? Again, we go to the word of God and we find a consistent pattern to the use of this gift. There on the day of Pentecost we see that what the crowds heard the disciples speaking were "the wonders of God!" The KJV puts it, "the wonderful works of God!" And the NASB puts it, "the mighty deeds of God!"

The disciples were simply praising God and declaring His greatness. It has been argued by cessationists of the "sign" gifts that this gift was utilized to preach the gospel in a miraculous way and that we don't need such means today to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But this is not what the Scriptures tell us was happening on the day of Pentecost. It wasn't until Peter described to the crowd what was happening, as the disciples were declaring the mighty deeds of God, that he then went on to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ, probably in either Aramaic or koine Greek, which most of the people would have understood.

Aramaic might make more sense since the people Peter is addressing are mostly Jews as we read in Acts.

ACT 2:14 "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "***Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem***, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."

Keep in mind that the day of Pentecost was a Jewish holy day that Jews would have been involved in, along with some converts from the Gentile world. This is the very reason all of these different Jews from all over the known world were in Jerusalem at this time.

And by the way, this answers the question as to what someone is doing when the gift of tongues is practiced then and today in the church. Keep in mind what the people heard in Jerusalem on that day. They heard the disciples speaking the wonders of God, declaring His greatness. The crowds simply heard the disciples praising God which is consistent with the way this gift is meant to be used.

Paul addresses this in 1CO 14:2 "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men *but to God*. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit."

If you've ever been in a place where someone was speaking in tongues you may have noticed that often the interpretation is not given, and we'll deal with that a little later, but in those instances where there is an interpretation more often than not it may sound something like, 'My little children I love you and I will never forsake you and you will be My witnesses to the utter most parts of the world.'

That's very encouraging, but it is not an interpretation to the tongue. How do we know that? Because the gift of tongues is not directed toward men, but to God, according to what we just read in 1Cor.14:2.

The interpretation I just used as an example was directed to men, not God. If a proper use of the gift of interpretation was utilized the interpretation would be closer to praises to God, or prayer or thanksgiving to God, or just declaring His greatness.

One of the things about the gift of tongues is that the utterances are given by the Holy Spirit. These utterances are not the result of you or me trying to create a language, which some in the church have done, precisely because of peer pressure. Also, one does not have control over which language one is given, although you do have control over the use of the gift.

What I mean is that when you begin to praise God with your new tongue, the language you use is what the Spirit gives you. But you can start and stop as you choose. It's not as though you're out of control and God has taken over your mouth with you just being an unwilling by-stander until He's done.

Unfortunately, with the way this gift is practiced often times in some circles you would think this is the case, but like the gift of prophecy, the recipient does have control.

1CO 14:32-33 "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace..."

Your desire to praise God with your new tongue may seem overwhelming, but to suggest that we have no control over our senses, which includes our ability to speak, is to miss the point of how the Spirit works.

The reason we know this is because of what the word of God tells us about another gift which is the gift of interpretation of tongues. The gift of interpretation is a sister gift of tongues, if you will, which the Spirit gives so that what is said in an unknown language, may then be understood within the Body of Christ for the church's edification.

Paul says in 1CO 14:28 "If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."

And so the gift of tongues is in the control of the speaker and if there is no one with the gift of interpretation the speaker should not speak out loud in the congregation, but may certainly speak to himself and to God without disturbing anyone near him.

By the way, this does not mean you can't speak out loud in your own prayer closet without an interpretation. And yet, I knew a woman who had the gift of tongues and always wondered what she was saying when she was home praising her God. She evidently prayed to God one night for the interpretation and God gave it to her and she was doubly blessed.

I'll get back to the gift of interpretation in a moment. Some have asked, what's the point of the gift of tongues? Why is it necessary to speak to God in an unlearned language, and is it really a language like French or German?

Well, to answer the second question, yes, it really is a language like French or German or any other language the Spirit decides to use in your life. Again, we go back to Pentecost and we see that the disciples spoke in languages which actually existed.

The whole point of languages, which by the way is something that God gave man from day one, is to communicate, either with God or one another. And so the gift of tongues is designed for us to communicate with God. We may not understand the language and that's why Paul says in 1CO 14:14 "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful."

In other words, my spirit rejoices within me as I praise God, but my mind doesn't get blessed in the process because I don't understand the language. And this is the reason for the gift of interpretation, which is why Paul also says in 1CO 14:13 "For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says."



Getting back to the language aspect for a moment. In 1CO 13:1 we read, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal."

Some would say that the languages spoken are not always earthly languages at all, but may include the language of angels. First of all, we don't know how angels communicate in the heavenly's. Do they need language as we understand it? We know they communicate with the Lord, but we can't say with any certainty what language it is.

When angels communicate with human beings in biblical settings it must be presumed they used the language of that human being. When, for example, the angel who sat on the tomb stone of the risen Christ, and said to the disciples, He is not here, He is risen, the angel presumably spoke the language of the disciples, which again was probably Aramaic or Greek.

But the point of 1Cor.13:1 is not to teach that we can imitate the language of angels. Rather Paul is simply using hyperbole to make a point. The point he was making is that even if he could speak with the tongues of men or angels but didn't have love it wouldn't make any difference. It would still be useless.

But for the sake of argument, let's assume there is a language of angels which we can use. God would still be able to give the interpretation for that language and that language would be used to direct our prayers and praises to Him.

But there may be other languages which the Spirit may give that are not used in the world today. The ancient language of Greek is not in use today. The ancient language of English is not in use today. In fact, you wouldn't recognize the language which is the source of our present day English language.

But, could that language be used today as a means of praising God? Sure, it is a language of men. And if the Spirit decided to give you that language you could certainly use it to honor and worship God.

I remember praising God one night in my bedroom in a language which seemed familiar. When I listened to it closely there were certain words which sounded like the words I've read in books and concordances. It sounded like koine Greek. Now I don't know how koine Greek, which is a dead language, sounded like. But it is a

phonetic language and I remember sounding out some of the words when I would do my studies in the word of God.

But there were two words which kept coming up. In fact they were so distinct that I remember writing them down phonetically. When I went to my concordance later I actually found these two words. They were different and yet they both spoke of the same thing. They spoke of death and dying.

Now, I didn't get the interpretation, but I suspect that I was praising God for the death of His Son for my sin and that I might continue to die to self and live to Him.

And so, whatever language the Spirit gives you, whether a modern language, which would include the thousands of languages in the world today, or an ancient language, or maybe the language of angels, God can and will give the interpretation.

What's interesting about this is that I've had people tell me that when they've heard people speaking in tongues in the church it sounded like gibberish or some other strange sound. First, let me say again, that there may be people who are speaking gibberish. It may not be the gift of tongues, it may a fleshly manifestation trying to imitate their friends who may in fact be trying to imitate their friends.

But, I would also say that when I've heard legitimate languages, like the languages which are used in Iraq and Iran, on a news report for example, I have to tell you that even listening closely it does not sound like any language with any sort of linguistic pattern. To me it literally sounds like gibberish. But does it make it any less a legitimate language because I hear it as gibberish? Of course not.

But let's not lose sight of why the Spirit gives this gift.

1CO 12:4-7 "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."

It is for the common good of the Body of Christ that this gift, or any gift, is given by the Spirit. In other words, your gift, in this case the gift of tongues, is meant for my good and for my edification when used in a public setting.

We know that the gift of tongues is certainly to edify the one using it whether it's used in the Body of Christ or in the privacy of their own home. Paul addresses this in 1CO 14:4 "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church."

But to use a gift exclusively for self-edification is against all that God intends by His word which clearly says the gifts are to be used for the common good. But again, the question must be raised how does speaking in an unknown language edify the Body of Christ?

Well, first of all it allows the one gifted to raise his voice to God in praises. But that's not the primary way we are edified with this gift because you can do that in your own language. The way in which we are edified with this gift is to demonstrate the closeness and the intimacy of our God in our midst.

This is a supernatural way of God showing Himself, through the Spirit, that He is in our midst. Remember, we are dealing with God, who is Spirit. In His mercy and grace He has provided a way in which we can actually "see, or hear" Him working in our presence. It's a personal touch in a way we can understand.

This is why the gift of interpretation of tongues is so important, because this is really where we hear this touch from God. Since we don't know what the language is, God is pleased to give us the interpretation through someone in the Body. It comes from Him. That's up close and personal. That's a God who is close and approachable.

And so the gift of interpretation must be employed when the gift of tongues is used in the Body of Christ in a public setting. Let's look at where this is found in the Scriptures. Turn to 1Cor.14:5-19...

Have you ever been around a group of people who were speaking a language you didn't understand? Having grown up in Ft. Lauderdale, Fl., Spanish was a language I knew somewhat. But when I went to Miami and was around people whose native tongue was Spanish there was no way I could keep up with them and eventually I tuned them out. None of it made any sense.

In a way it's as though you're being excluded from any interchange with them on a communicating level. You don't receive anything from them and they can't receive anything from you. In a setting with other believers who are speaking in an unknown tongue a similar phenomenon occurs. No blessing is exchanged.

With the gift of tongues, if you go on in your tongue and I have no understanding of what you're saying, how can I say Amen to your praises and prayers to God? I am not blessed, and for that matter neither are you. Your spirit is, but your mind has no understanding.

And so we should pray for interpretation. A note about interpretation. The Greek word for interpretation literally means to explain thoroughly. This is different from a translation.

To give a translation is to give somewhat of a word-for-word account of what was said, whereas an interpretation is to explain what was said. This is why for example, someone may speak in an unknown tongue for what seems like a long time and yet the interpretation may only take a relatively short time.

But in giving the interpretation the Holy Spirit allows an overview of what was being said. And this is not that unusual even with languages we do know. For example, I could go on and on and explain the technical aspects of the combustion engine, but then someone could come right behind me and sum it up by saying, the spark plug ignites the gas in the piston chamber and an explosion takes place which moves the piston and then eventually transfers the power through the crank case to the wheels.

And that's often how the interpretation will come to us in the gift of interpretation. Someone may eloquently speak in Parisian French the wonders of God, and someone may interpret that concisely and give a shortened version of what was said so that we may all be edified. But remember, that it is God who is making known the interpretation for the Body to be edified.

But what if someone in the church knew Parisian French, could they give an interpretation? Why not? That however, would not be the gift of interpretation being used in that instance.

Robert Gromacki in his commentary on 1 Corinthians states that there are three goals of this gift of tongues and the gift of interpretation. **1)** "It must enlist the participation of others." **2)** "It must give understanding." **3)** "It must promote edification."

If this is not being accomplished in a setting with other believers then this gift is not being properly used and what it then often results in is chaos and clamor and something like clanging, as Paul puts it. People are not edified in a biblical sense and visitors think you're nuts.

1CO 14:23 "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?"

The world already thinks we're nuts, let's not remove any doubt by improperly using the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But how do we use this gift in our Body of Calvary Chapel, Port Charlotte? The Holy Spirit who gives this gift is also the one who gives us the word of God to lay out the guidelines.

We read in 1CO 14:27-28 "If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three -should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God."

This would suggest that there is a time set aside for the gift of tongues to be used . For us it might be during the praise and worship on Sunday morning where we offer a time to edify and encourage the body with your gifts.

Another time might be during prayer on Wednesday evenings as we humble ourselves before the Lord, as we seek His face and seek His direction and nearness in our lives and the life of this church.

In fact, anytime we meet as the body of Christ to worship and praise our Lord, the gifts the Lord has given us may be used to edify and encourage the body. In the case of the gift of tongues, however, God still expects things to be orderly. And so, if this were to occur, only two or three would speak in turn and there would have to be an interpretation for each.

If there was no interpretation then I would gently say that there appears to be no one with the gift of interpretation and so there will not be a need for any further tongues. We would simply forego that gift for that time and allow others to use their gifts or their desire to praise or pray to the Lord in English.

The gift of tongues would never be used during the time of teaching or preaching, again the reason being that that would cause confusion and disorder while the Pastor or teacher is endeavoring to feed Christ's sheep.

Again, standing up and interrupting the Pastor as he feeds the flock from the word of God does not edify the Body any more than everyone in the church speaking in tongues at the same time does.

1CO 14:39-40 "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

There are many today in the church-at-large who forbid the gift of speaking in tongues and they arrive at that position, not with a biblical warrant, but on what they believe to be an abrogation of the gift. But the Scriptures give no directive for such abrogation other than a misuse of 1Cor.13:8. And when we get to that portion we'll deal with it accordingly.

May we desire the gifts the Spirit has for us and may we use them properly and biblically so that the Body may be edified. And may all be done out of love for Christ and our neighbor to the glory of God.