SPEAKING IN TONGUES

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE ACTUALLY SAY?

STUDENT STUDY GUIDE • Includes teaching notes and Scripture readings

Use this guide to follow the teaching or study on your own. Read each passage and compare how speaking in tongues functions in its context.

1. FROM BABEL TO PENTECOST

REVIEW FROM LAST WEEK

Last week, we traced the story from exile to fulfillment. We saw how God promised to give His people a new heart and put His Spirit within them.

EZEKIEL 36:26–27 (ESV)

> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

JOEL 2:28–29 (ESV)

> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

LAST WEEK WE SAW THE FULFILLMENT OF THIS PROMISE IN ACTS 2. Before we go any further into our study tonight, I want us to look at Genesis 11:1-9 together.

I want you to look for the problem in the story and the outcome of the problem in the narrative.

THE TOWER OF BABEL

GENESIS 11:1–9

> Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. 2 And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. 3 And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. 4 Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” 5 And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. 6 And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” 8 So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. 9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

- PROBLEM – Human Pride
- RESULT – Confusion and division

Now fast-forward to Acts 2.

ACTS 2:1–11

> When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

TONGUE – mean the thing in your mouth or language depending on the context. So here it is saying, they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

DO YOU SEE THE CONNECTION?

In Babel human pride brings division, but now the Spirit is bringing the divided nations back together.

- People from many nations were gathered in Jerusalem.
- the Holy Spirit was poured out.
- The disciples began speaking in other languages.
- People heard the mighty works of God in their own language.

AT BABEL, pride led to their division. AT PENTECOST, GOD is bringing people back together through the Spirit.

ACTS 2:16–17

> But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

17 “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

In other words, Peter is letting them know what they are witnessing is the promise of God to fill His people with His Spirit.

This is significant, because the Spirit of God is what filled the tabernacle and the temple. Now we see Him filling people. Why? Because we are now the Temple of God.

This is the Background for what we will be discussing tonight. Speaking in tongues.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to a church that was incredibly gifted spiritually, but at the same time, they were immature.

There were several problems in the church that Paul needed to address, along with questions they had written to him about.

When we get to chapter 12, Paul begins addressing spiritual gifts. Apparently, there was some confusion about how these gifts were supposed to operate, especially when the church came together.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:1

> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.

Paul is going to show us 9 gifts. Instead of reading them, I want to break them into three categories.

CATEGORY ONE: DISCERNING GIFTS

1. Word of Wisdom

2. Word of Knowledge

3. Discerning of Spirits

CATEGORY TWO: DYNAMIC GIFTS

1. Gift of Faith

2. Gifts of Healing

3. Working of Miracles

CATEGORY THREE: DECLARATIVE GIFTS

1. Prophecy

2. Various Kinds of Tongues

3. Interpretation of Tongues

ILLUSTRATION: THE SHOPPING CART

Imagine these nine gifts were items on the shelf at a store.

You could walk down the aisle, look at all nine, and put whichever ones you wanted in your shopping cart.

WHICH ONES WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

I don't know about you, but I want whatever God has for me.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7

> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The purpose of these gifts is to benefit one another. To build each other up. The desired outcome of these gifts is to bring unity to the body of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:11

> ALL THESE! All these what? Gifts

All these (gifts) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions (distributes) to each one individually as he wills.

- the Holy Spirit
- Empowers the gifts

- Distributes the gifts as He sees fit to accomplish His purpose.

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 14, Paul says we should desire the gifts. But at the same time we need to remember you don't determine which gift you receive, but you can refuse to operate in a gift you receive.

My personal observation and experience is that God gives you what you need when you need it.

I want to pause for a moment, because it is important to mention that Paul says the gifts are meaningless if we don't have love. So, as wonderful as the gifts are we don't need them to be elevated above the fruit of the Spirit.

Now I want you to notice something in Paul's list: VARIOUS KINDS OF TONGUES.

NOTICE HOW TONGUES FUNCTION IN DIFFERENT PASSAGES

As you read, ask: Who is speaking? To whom? Does anyone understand the words? Who is built up? The following three categories describe how tongues appear to function in these passages; Paul does not explicitly name three separate gifts.

If you buy a variety pack of chips at the store, what does that mean? There are different kinds of chips in the box!

Paul tells us there are various kinds of tongues, and when we look at Scripture, we see that tongues can function in different ways.

Tonight I want to show you three kinds of tongues that I believe we can identify in Scripture.

THE FIRST KIND: LANGUAGES UNDERSTOOD BY OTHERS

ACTS 2:4–8

> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?

TWO POSSIBLE SCENARIOS I SEE IN THE TEXT

1. 1. A miracle of speaking: The disciples spoke languages they had never learned, and the people understood them.

2. A miracle of hearing: The disciples spoke in tongues, and the Holy Spirit enabled the people to hear and understand them in their own languages.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

My Great-grandfather experienced something like this in California as he was passing by the Azusa street revival. He heard someone speaking about God in Armenian, but when he tried to communicate with the man, he realized that the man did not know Armenian.

The point of Acts 2 is not to explain the mechanics of tongues, but to show us how God fulfilled His promise to pour out His Spirit and began bringing people from every nation together through Christ.

In Acts 2, the miracle allowed people to hear the mighty works of God in their own language.

THE SECOND KIND: PERSONAL PRAYER LANGUAGE

Now let's look at what Paul says about tongues in 1 Corinthians 14:2.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:2

> For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

DO YOU SEE THE DIFFERENCE?

- In Acts 2, people understood the language.
- Here Paul describes someone speaking to God in a language no one present understands.

I believe this is an example of a personal prayer language.

WHY IS THIS BENEFICIAL?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:4-5

> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

We will get to the second portion of this passage in a moment, but I want you to notice why Paul desires people to use this gift as personal prayer. He says it builds up the individual speaking.

THE THIRD KIND: TONGUES WITH INTERPRETATION

We've looked at tongues being used in personal prayer. But what about when the church comes together?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:2 (REVIEW)

> Paul says that someone speaking in a tongue is speaking to God, and no one understands what is being said. Now look at 1 Corinthians 14:4-5

1 CORINTHIANS 14:4–5

> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 5 Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Prophecy isn't just about foretelling the future. It can also be a message from God that strengthens, encourages, or comforts His people.

DO YOU NOTICE THE DISTINCTION PAUL IS MAKING?

- When someone speaks in a tongue without interpretation, they build up themselves.
- When tongues are interpreted, the entire church can be built up.

THE DIFFERENCE IS UNDERSTANDING.

1. In one case it builds up the individual

2. But when it is partnered with interpretation, it can build up the church.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:13–17

> Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. 14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 15 What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 16 Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? 17 For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up.

Paul explains that even when someone is giving thanks to God, the people around them cannot participate if they don't understand what is being said.

NOW NOTICE WHAT PAUL SAYS NEXT.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:18–19

> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. 19 Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

WHY WOULD PAUL SAY THAT?

Because there is a difference between what builds me up personally and what builds up the entire church.

In personal prayer, I can speak to God without anyone else understanding what I'm saying.

But when we come together as the church, we should prioritize what benefits everyone.

THAT IS WHY INTERPRETATION MATTERS IN THE PUBLIC GATHERING.

Personally, I pray in the Spirit throughout our service, but it is in the context of my prayer and worship to God.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26–28

> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God.

Paul gives clear instructions:

- Two or at most three should speak.
- Each should speak in turn.
- Someone must interpret.
- If there is no interpretation, a person should not draw attention to themselves but should speak to himself and to God.

WHY?

Because the purpose of spiritual gifts in the gathered church is to build up the body.

THE POINT:

What builds me up personally doesn't necessarily build up everyone around me. When we gather as the church, we should prioritize what benefits the entire body.

BIG IDEA: Everything must be done decently and in order. Paul says, God is not a God of confusion.

IS SPEAKING IN TONGUES AVAILABLE FOR EVERY BELIEVER?

This is where Christians, including Pentecostals, have different understandings.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:29–30

> Paul asks a series of questions:

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

The expected answer is no.

WHY SOME SAY NO

They understand Paul's question to mean that not every believer receives the gift of tongues in the same way that not all are called to be an apostle.

the Spirit distributes different gifts to different members of the body.

WHY MANY PENTECOSTALS SAY YES

They distinguish between tongues as a personal prayer language and the public gift of tongues that requires interpretation.

From that perspective, Paul's question in chapter 12 concerns the public ministry gift, not necessarily every expression of tongues.

They also point to Paul's words:

1 CORINTHIANS 14:5

> Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy.

DOES SPEAKING IN TONGUES PROVE YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT?

I want to make something very clear.

I do not believe speaking in tongues is the required evidence that someone has received the Holy Spirit.

I believe we receive the Spirit when we belong to Christ.

THREE SCRIPTURES

ROMANS 8:9

> Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

Paul makes possession of the Spirit essential to belonging to Christ.

EPHESIANS 1:13–14

> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Paul says that when the Ephesians heard the gospel and believed in Christ, they were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.

1 CORINTHIANS 12:13

> For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Notice Paul's emphasis on all.

Every believer belongs to the one body through the work of the Spirit.

THE POINT:

You do not need to speak in tongues to prove that you belong to Jesus.

the Spirit is not reserved for a select group of Christians who have experienced a particular gift.

We can desire the gifts without making any one gift the test of salvation or the possession of the Spirit.

Here is where I would like to land!

Let’s go back to the illustration I used at the beginning of the gifts on the shelf at the store. Which ones would you want in your cart?

I hope you would desire whatever God has made available.

I want to give you two different thoughts that will come to the same outcome.

2. 1. The gift of tongues is available for everyone. If that is true, I should pray and ask God to do that work in me.
3. 2. The gift of tongues is not for everyone. Who determines who gets the gift? So I should pray God, if this is for me, I want it.

The point is, we should desire whatever He has made available to us. We should pray that he would use us however He wants to use us, and we should surrender ourselves to be used.