

# Speaking in Tongues

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[0:00] Okay, so we're looking this evening at the, we're going through a list of the different gifts of the Spirit, and this evening we're looking at the gift of tongue speaking.

So we read a passage in Acts which spoke about that, and now we're going to read another passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 and verses 1 to 19.

In chapter 12 actually, before we get to that, chapter 12 it lists out the spiritual gifts, and it says, to another faith by the same gift, to another gifts of healing, by the one Spirit, to another working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

And then we come to chapter 14, which speaks a little bit more, it's the only place, the other place in the Bible that speaks about this, and we're going to read verses 1 to 19 and then I'll preach about this theme this evening.

Pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. 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.

[1:14] On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and courage and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself but the one who prophesies builds up the church.

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.

Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in a tongue, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching?

But even lifeless instruments such as the flute or the harp do not give distinct notes. How will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will be ready for battle?

So with yourselves, if you, with your tongue, you utter speaks that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

[2:12] There are doubtless many different languages in the world and none is without meaning. But if you do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me.

So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Therefore one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my Spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. 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. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your Spirit, how can anyone in position of an outsider say amen to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying?

For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church, I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others than 10,000 words in a tongue.

[3:18] Okay, we will stop there and we are going to look at this theme this evening. Okay, quite a controversial chapter for us, maybe, quite a difficult chapter and quite a difficult theme.

And this is possibly where there may be a little bit more divergence in our thinking in terms of controversies within the wider church between what we believe in Reformed theology and what charismatic theology, as it is so called, will believe.

We therefore go in different directions in many ways when it comes to particularly these what might be called signs and wonder type gifts of the Spirit that are being spoken of, miracles and tongue speaking and healing particularly these kind of gifts.

So I realize and I know that I will not be settling the matter this evening, okay, but there are certain things that I would like to aim for. The first is that it is really important that we engage with Scripture, that we engage with the Bible, not being afraid to do so even when it is difficult, and understand and know where the emphasis of Scripture lies.

That's really important for us as believers in this or in any other subject that we're looking at. Also, I think when we are looking at an area where there is a difference of opinion and a different way of interpreting Scripture, then we need to be generous in our critique of other people because there's no doubt we can learn from them and learn from nearly everyone we disagree with.

[ 4 : 58 ] I think that's a good principle in life generally and particularly in this area. And also, as we do so, be aware of our own weaknesses, the weaknesses of our own position, of our own lives maybe, which sometimes do not necessarily reflect well on what we believe.

So we're aware of our own weaknesses, we are generous in our critique of others, and we seek to understand the emphasis of Scripture in this as in all other areas.

So any way of introduction, I just want to give a brief overview, a very brief overview of the strengths and weaknesses. And by its very nature, it needs to be a generalization.

So I apologize because it's a generalization. All generalizations will have some truth, but they are nonetheless generalizations. I hope that there's at least some kind of sense of usefulness in so doing.

The strengths and concerns maybe that I would highlight in the charismatic movement, and I know that that is in itself very broad.

[ 6 : 06 ] And also some of our own, in our own reform tradition, some of the strengths and some of the concerns that we would have. With regard to the charismatic movement, these are general observations.

Many who have, or base, have a charismatic theology that undergirds their faith, are tremendously godly people and very passionate about their faith.

They stress very strongly the reality of God in their lives, in their worship particularly. They believe in the power of God and the willingness of God to convert people and to see lives transform.

And they themselves believe very strongly in the power of sharing their faith and seeing the lives of other people transform. They have, I have found certainly in my experience, tremendously committed prayer lives.

And they worship with Pentecostal passion, and I have a great personal love and respect for many within the charismatic tradition, and for how they live their lives and how they glorify and serve Jesus in their lives.

[ 7 : 25 ] Some concerns I would share, and it's maybe not so much with individuals, but more with a, if we can call it a worldwide movement, the charismatic movement, there will sometimes be an emphasis of experience, Christian, or a spiritual experience overriding Christian truth, or that truth is moulded by experience rather than the other way around.

They can be guilty of encouraging a two-tier Christianity. I'm going to speak a little bit more about that when they, when they emphasize a, a, a later experience to conversion, which is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, where you receive the Holy Spirit later than you receive Christ, and the mark of that is speaking in tongue.

So I'm going to come on to speak about that in a little while. But really, sometimes the, the focus on signs and wonders, external manifestations of the truth in very dramatic ways can sometimes be problematic.

But for me, the greatest concern I would have with the worldwide charismatic movement is its emphasis on the prosperity gospel, and it would preach very much, particularly in, in Africa, where the gospel is, is, is exponentially growing, but often through television, evangelism, evangelists such as Benny Hinn or Kreation Daller or Joel Osteen from America, and they've got really expensive and really flash kind of presentations of the gospel, but who genuinely are generally express a gospel that focuses on, on prosperity and, you know, health, kind of health, wealth and prosperity gospel, and in its, its, in its rawest form is no gospel at all, the prosperity gospel.

Trust Jesus and it will make you rich and healthy and well. There are very little mention of the atonement or the cross or carrying your cross or humble obedience, suffering and perseverance,

and it is an attractive gospel, and it is one that is powerfully moving in the world in which we live, and I would say, I would be very concerned by that, very concerned by that particular emphasis. [ 9 : 55 ] But in our own reform tradition, what are some of our strengths? I think will we value the primacy and the significance and the importance of God's word for faith and life, and we recognize the fundamental truth of, of what God has given us in His word as the final word, we look for truth and for truth as it's revealed in Jesus Christ to renew our minds as well as our hearts.

We do focus I think on miracle, I hope, but particularly the miracle of grace to transform life and society. We believe in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit for all people, and their emphasis on the glory of the sovereignty of God is significant.

Our concerns, oh well, I could speak all night about our concerns, as an insider, it can be that we are too cerebral, that we just focus on the intellect too much.

We rely too much just on knowledge rather than on experience and on the reality of Jesus Christ in our day-to-day living. There can be in our tradition a discontinuity between faith and life, a lacking of fervour, the frozen chosen.

We rest on the pride of our knowledge at the expense of the urgency and the passion for reaching out to the lost, our prayer lives, our witness.

[ 11 : 24 ] Both traditions can be guilty of separatism and being divided and having that kind of mentality which is unhelpful and often proud.

So a very brief summary of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the different traditions that we're thinking about. But I want to look at two areas briefly here this evening with regard to the gift of tongues as it's given to us in the Bible.

Two areas for consideration. One is the baptism in the Holy Spirit, which I mentioned at the beginning, which Colin read about in Acts chapter 2, and is the basis for the charismatic theology behind a second blessing that the disciples were converted, they belonged to Jesus, and then they had to wait until the Holy Spirit was sent.

When the Holy Spirit came, the evidence of that was they all spoke in tongues. And they have taken that as being a principle as a mark of this empowering that the Spirit gives in the second blessing, and the mark of that is that you speak in tongues.

I'll say a little bit more about that. That two-stage experience, conversion and then empowering.

And that empowering gives you the fullness of the Spirit, and it makes you able to work and serve Jesus Christ.

[ 12 : 56 ] Some Christians don't have it, and they're encouraged to wait on the Spirit and pray and plead and tarry until the Spirit comes and baptizes them with His presence.

And the evidence of that is that they will speak in tongues. Okay. So, what can we say about that account in Acts, and how do we apply it in our own lives today?

What we find is that it's a very different passage, because what's happening there is really that the Holy Spirit is being poured out on the Christian church for the first time in the New Covenant.

Jesus said, you know, in Christ in the upper room, you will wait. I will depart, I will ascend to heaven, but I will send the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit was to be given to the whole church.

And in Acts chapter 2, we read there the prophecy, I don't know if we did that, actually read the prophecy. We did, we read the prophecy from Joel in these last days that God declares, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.

[ 13 : 57 ] And this is what happened at Pentecost. It was a unique event. It was a once-for-all event for the Holy Spirit, as God's gift to the church was poured out on all of the church as it was then.

The whole of the church was gathered together. And it was ushering a new era where there was not only speaking in different languages, because there was people from all over the world and they all heard the gospel in their own language.

It wasn't an ecstatic language, it was just different languages. It was also accompanied by what looked like tongues of fire and what felt like a mighty powerful wind.

So there was this whole concept of the gospel coming with power, with purity, and with universality.

The gospel wasn't just as Thomas was talking about this morning, it wasn't just for the Jewish people, it was for the whole world.

And so the gift of different languages were poured out at Pentecost as a mark of this change and of this newness and of the gospel going out to every part of the world, in Judea, in Samaria, and in the whole world, the gospel was to go out.

[15:16] So this was a unique event. It was the evidence that we had moved into the age of the Spirit. Mission was for all. You remember what happened at Babel, the Old Testament, where God confused our languages, because they wanted to set themselves up as being those who could reach heaven and they wanted to make a name for themselves?

Well, this is kind of, ironically, this is the opposite of Babel. It is God not confusing their language, but making the gospel clear to every different language and people who were at Pentecost and that a sign that the gospel was going out to the whole world.

As Peter goes on and preaches, he says to them, Repent and believe in verse 38. And that was the gospel message.

The gospel message was to go out with this great message which was revealed to all these people in all their own tongues and to bring the gospel to them.

And the Spirit then was for all of them. The Spirit went into every Christian. They were all baptized in the Spirit on that day, as we read and have read in Romans 9, for you ever or not, in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

[16:38] Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. Every believer has the Spirit of Christ. And this baptism in the Spirit was the unique first event that was a reminder that the gift of the Holy Spirit went out to the whole church and to the whole world.

So I would argue very strongly against the whole concept of a second blessing as a distinct and separate stage where some people are lower class Christians as it were, they've only got Jesus. And then others are empowered to serve in this once for all filling when they receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit and they therefore speak in tongues.

That teaching isn't given to us in the New Testament. It has been extrapolated from this passage here.

I do recognize we all need to be kept to keep on being filled with the Spirit as Ephesians chapter 5 verse 18 tells us.

[17:50] And there's no doubt that that is important and significant for us that we are those who grieve and quench and resist the Spirit. We need to keep on being filled with the Spirit.

But we don't see in Scripture teaching that says you receive Christ in a later stage, you receive the Spirit and the mark of that is speaking in tongues.

So that is one area, baptism in the Spirit, which is a fairly fundamental area in charismatic theology. The second is a little bit different and not quite so, I don't think so, clear cut is the gift of speaking in tongues, which is different.

I think even in charismatic theology, it's different from baptism in the Spirit as it is spoken of here. And for that we look to 1 Corinthians chapter really 12 to 14.

[18:50] We have the different gifts spoken of in chapter 12 and the gift of speaking in tongues is one of them and then the gift of interpreting tongues is another. I think the whole passage 12 to 14, you should go and read it if you have time, because it's very interesting.

And it's a difficult section of the Bible for both charismatic theology and reform theology, reform thinkers alike. But we recognize that there are some very important things spoken of in this section. It is different from baptism in the Spirit. This is the gift of tongue. Just as we've talked about the different gifts of the Spirit, this is the gift of tongue speaking.

Now, among lots of commentators, there's a difference of opinion even in chapter 14 in the section we read exactly about what tongue speaking was in this account.

And it seems to be unclear. You can take some parts of the chapter and it looks like it's just different languages again, foreign languages that God gave some people an amazing spiritual gift to be able to speak and then someone else to interpret.

[20:05] And both can be said, you know, different languages, chapter 12 and verse 10, it says to another, the workings of minute, another prophecy, to another, the ability to another various kinds of tongues or various kinds of languages that could be interpreted to another interpretation of these languages.

But then in chapter 14 and verse 2, we have, for men who speak in a tongue speak not to men but to God, for no one understands them, he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

And that would tend to suggest that it might be more of an ecstatic spiritual language. So there's differences of opinion and although the word tongues is the same in acts as it is in Corinth, but we do recognize that there are differences, although it's still regarded by those from our charismatic

tradition, our brothers and sisters, that it is an absolutely important spiritual gift for today. But even then, we have a little bit of confusion about what is the purpose of the gift, because in verse 4 of chapter 14 that we read, sorry, in verse 2, it would seem to be that it is a private language that someone in a tongue speaks not to men but to God, and just is something for personal edification.

But then in verse 5 it speaks about if someone's going to speak in tongues, let someone interpret it so that the church may be built up. So is it for the building up of the church as it's interpreted, or is it just for the individual in this private language, in an ecstatic private language before themselves and God?

[ 21 : 46 ] These are some of the difficulties that are in the passage. What can we say about the gift of tongue speaking in Corinth and maybe for us? Well, can you say one or two things? One is that not everyone had it, okay, that's fine, that's a gift.

Like all the other gifts, not everyone had the gift, so it's different from baptism in the Spirit, which the whole of the church had at the beginning. It was experienced in a church, Corinth, the church here, it was an immature church.

It was a divided church. It was a church that wasn't spiritually mature. It was an early church. It seems that tongue speaking, whether ecstatic or different languages, was overvalued by this church, and some people were proud that they were better than other Christians because they had this gift and other people didn't have it.

And Paul's speaking into that context, and he concludes the whole section, really in verse 39 of chapter 14, and said, So my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

So it really, it doesn't give it a huge ringing endorsement even at the end of this section. However, Paul did speak in tongues, and he wished that others spoke in tongues.

[ 23 : 05 ] And we need to recognize that Paul does say that. He himself spoke in tongues, verse 18, and he encouraged others to do so. However, the emphasis very clearly in this passage is that when tongues were experienced by the church, by people in the church in Corinth, the value that was really on these tongues being interpreted.

And that's why he speaks about prophesy and the importance of God revealing truth. Remember, all of this is before the Bible was completed, before they had the word of God completed for them. And Paul is really insistent in public that tongue speaking, and this would, for me, tend to suggest that it's more like another language rather than something ecstatic, because it could be interpreted, and therefore a message came from God.

It was to be edifying, and edifying for the whole church, for the building up of believers. Remember, these were the days before the canon of Scripture was completed. The church needed to know what God was saying, they heard that through prophesy, and they heard that through tongue speaking that was interpreted, and they heard that through teaching and preaching and the apostolic foundations that were being laid.

So remember that when we think about Corinth. But also remember, I'm going to come back to this, Paul's emphasis in Corinth, this early New Testament church, which had tongue speaking, which also had a lot of crazy things going on, that I desire to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified.

[ 24 : 37 ] Chapter 2 verse 2, that was absolutely crucial to what Paul was emphasizing in this church, the supremacy of grace and truth, and I'm going to come back to that because you'll see there's a love sandwich in this section, there's a love sandwich.

But also just before we come towards the conclusion of it, we do remember that the New Testament church did have miraculous foundational gifts. We've already looked at some of them.

The apostolic gift which ceased with the death of the apostles was a foundational gift, and in Ephesians 2.20 we have that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

So we recognize that there were these foundational gifts that were really important, they were given at the early part of the church before the Scripture was completed.

And we also recognize that they seem to have been authenticated because there was no finished Scripture. They seem to be authenticated by signs and wonders, which I think some of these gifts refer to.

[ 25 : 45 ] I'm going to move on from that one. In Romans 15, Paul says, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God so that Jerusalem and all around the Elyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ.

He's speaking about his own apostolic authority, and he's saying that his ministry, his teaching was authenticated by signs and wonders, miracles, tongue speaking, healings, all of these kind of things.

And then again in 2 Corinthians, the signs of a true apostle, he says, were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. So it seems as if that the early church and the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and what they were bringing was authenticated by amazing signs and wonders.

And again in Hebrews, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his word.

There's this sense in which the authentication of the message was given in signs and wonders to, as it were, back up the witness that the apostles had to the death and resurrection, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

[ 27 : 06 ] And I think Paul here in Corinth is addressing some of the uses and abuses of these signs and wonders. So the gift of tongues. What can we say about speaking in tongues today?

As far as I can make out in the charismatic tradition, tongue speaking is almost exclusively, as far as I can make out, is almost exclusively seen as a private, ecstatic language between the individual and their God.

I am not aware of tongue speaking in charismatic circles being seen as foreign languages that are miraculously given and then interpreted.

It is seen almost exclusively as a, almost like a private language between the individual and their God in order for them to draw closer. I'm not sure how often tongue speaking in a charismatic context would be interpreted.

It is connected with the Holy Spirit empowering and it is for many a very real and meaningful experience as it draws them closer to God.

[ 28 : 18 ] As it's done humbly and as that's done for the common good, as it's done in humility, in whom my God is sovereign in His gifts and in His use of gifts, I have not much really to say into that.

Personally, my communion with God is sweet in whatever language. I've only got one. So well, it's that and groaning.

So these are the two languages that I have. But for me, the evidence and the assurance and the blessing of the Holy Spirit is sensing His love in my heart and knowing His transforming power as I seek to serve Him in grace and humility.

And communication and sharing that truth with others is hugely significant. I am aware of constantly being in need of being filled with the Holy Spirit and of knowing more of the precious gift I have that I was given at conversion, that I was given the gift of God's presence in the person of this Holy Spirit.

So I'm going to just close with a couple of things, just speaking about the emphasis of the New Testament. What's the emphasis of Paul here and of the New Testament? Well, it's that love sandwich.

[ 29 : 38 ] Okay, so you've got chapter 12, which speaks about the gifts. You've got chapter 14 that expresses a bit more about these gifts of healing. And then in chapter 13, there's a love sandwich, the one that we all know so well, the one that's often read at weddings.

And it starts with, I will show you the most excellent way, and it finishes, pursue love and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. So the emphasis of Scripture, the emphasis of God's word always is this significant reality of knowing God's love in our hearts.

That's the emphasis of Scripture, knowing God through His grace and through His salvation.

Because I think signs and wonders can take away from that.

If you remember, it's the knowledge of God that Jesus says, and then I will declare, I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. And if you remember, the precursor to that is them saying, Lord, Lord, did we not do great miracles in Your name?

Did we not raise the dead? Did we not do amazing things? Great signs and wonders. But He said, look, you didn't know me. You didn't know me. It was the knowledge of God through grace and through His greatest gift of salvation is absolutely crucial to us in knowing His love.

[ 31 : 00 ] That is the most important thing for the common good of the church, is that we live lives of grace and love. And they're in His miracle and they're in His power, and they're in His great significance.

I think the placement of 1 Corinthians 13 is absolutely divine and important, because it reminds us that this is the most excellent way.

Why is it important? Because God's focus is on character, first and foremost, as we reflect what Jesus has done for us, and as we follow Jesus, the fruit of the Spirit is more significant than the gifts of the Spirit, because the fruit of the Spirit says who we are.

The gifts of the Spirit is what we do. And if we get our character right under Christ, then we know that we will use the gifts He gives us in the right way, whatever and however we understand these gifts.

His sovereign gifts will flow when we are bearing the fruit of the Spirit. And this is what's most important for you and me tonight, is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

[ 32 : 18 ] The gifts of the Spirit, sorry, the fruit of the Spirit, which He says that is the most excellent way. The gifts are will or sovereign.

They're God's gifts. But how we live our day out, the focus is on our character. And I think that's outplayed in Scripture to self as we understand its infallible truth for us and its revelation.

In itself, it's progressive in what it reveals. And you'll find that there's very little mention, there's no mention after this chapter. In any of the later epistles, in any of these important epistles, particularly the one to Romans, there's no mention of these spiritual gifts.

There's no mention of tongue speaking, interpretation, and in all the problems of the churches, the second blessing is never given as a solution.

Speaking in tongues is never given as a solution. Doing miracles is never given as a solution.

Raising people from the dead is not given as a solution. It is living out the love of Christ.

[ 33 : 23 ] And we recognize that emphasis. But we also recognize the huge emphasis on the Holy Spirit in every believer. We certainly must do that because the Holy Spirit points us to Jesus Christ.

Jesus says that himself in John 16 when he's offering the gift of the Spirit. He will go, the Holy Spirit will glorify me for he will take what is mine and he will declare it to you.

He has this great work in our lives of declaring Jesus and of making Jesus known to us. And he does empower us for service, for mission.

He was given in the context of mission, of the good news of the gospel going out to the whole world. That's our calling. We have great good news. We have so much to learn from our charismatic friends and the passion and the commitment they have to reach out to the gospel far more than we do.

And they're seeing far more conversions than we see because there's a deep-seated belief in who they are and what they do. And that is absolutely challenging to us. And we need to seek to recognize the emphasis of who the Holy Spirit is and what he does and we're not to quench him, we're not to resist him, we're not to oppose him in our lives and hearts.

[ 34 : 42 ] He is the Spirit of truth. Remember that. And in conclusion, remember that the gifts of the Spirit are the gifts of a sovereign God.

He knows the needs of the church and the disposal of his gifts or otherwise are with him. So we don't make any final judgment on these because the needs of the church may change and God may change things.

But as we understand Scripture, we know where its emphasis lies and its emphasis lies on character and the gifts, the fruit of the Spirit and the most excellent way, faith, hope and love, the greatest of these is love.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would help us to understand better your truth. We recognize that we understand only as you open our eyes to see and that we must, as we were reminded this morning, put our trust in you.

Help us as Christians, young Christians, old Christians, immature Christians, mature Christians.

Help us to look to Jesus and to find our wisdom and our strength and our help.

[ 35 : 56 ] May we know the great gift that He has given us, that given all of us, amazing gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to love you and enables us to love one another.

New commandment I give unto you, that you love your neighbor as yourself. What is the great commandment? What is how are the commandments summed up? Love God, love your neighbor, says Jesus.

Help us to live that and may that emphasis and that crucial centrality be ours and may we not become proud in our tradition or proud of our thinking.

I thank you this evening so much for so many of our charismatic friends in this city who reach out with the gospel, who love the church, who love the gospel, who are holy and prayerful people, and who worship with passion and zeal.

And we pray for them, we pray that they would remember the emphasis of Scripture as we would recognize the emphasis also and that we would remember that we head together in the same direction with Jesus as our Lord and King.

[ 37 : 08 ] We do thank you for them and pray your blessing on them and on us in our lives and our worship for Jesus' sake. Amen.