

St. Mary's Sermon Series

**Romans 8 v 12-17 & 26-28 and
1 Corinthians 14 v 13-25**

**Spiritual Gifts:
Gift of Tongues (part 1)**

For this sermon series we are splitting the gift of tongues into two parts: firstly, the personal use of the gift of tongues, which is the topic of my sermon today and secondly, the gift of tongues with interpretation for public use.

It is often said that “the pen is mightier than the sword” but I would like to suggest that the tongue is, in fact, mightier than the pen! We have two ears and one mouth (tongue) and therefore we should use them in those proportions - listening twice as much as we speak.

Some say that the gift of tongues and interpretation are the least of the gifts, because they were the last listed in 1 Corinthians 12. Perhaps a better reason is that the other gifts listed are known and referred to in the Old Testament, but the gift of tongues and interpretation was not given until Pentecost.

So why does the gift of tongues cause controversy within our churches. In 1 Corinthians 12:10, Paul writes, “. . .to another is given different kinds of tongues”. In the gifts of the spirit, tongues, interpretation and prophecy differ in that they are not guides for our lives by, but are there to help unfold God to us.

When a friend of ours was praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit, he asked, ‘but do I have to speak in tongues?’ He carried on, ‘I am not interested in the ‘tongues’ thing I have heard about.’ Knowing our friend, I believe he was concerned that speaking in tongues was some expression of emotion and he was certainly not a person to show his emotions in public.

The gift of tongues is not the only sign of being filled with the spirit, and not all people who are filled with the spirit will manifest this gift. Though I would suggest that everyone wanting this gift could be given this gift; but speaking in tongues should not be forced on anyone or by anyone.

However, speaking in tongues is a common denominator of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and when we do receive the Holy Spirit in our lives it is a life changing phenomena. And when we are filled with the Holy Spirit this should manifest through the fruits of the spirit. The disciples knew on the spot when a person had received baptism in the Holy Spirit and they knew three thousand at Pentecost were baptised: Acts 2:11 – “(both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!”

Peter knew that the house of Cornelius had received the Holy Spirit:
Acts 10:46 - *For they heard them speaking in tongues[a] and praising God.*

Paul knew the Ephesians mentioned in Acts 12 had received the Holy Spirit:
Acts 19:6 - *When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues[a] and prophesied*

Jesus himself in Mark 16:17 *knew what was to be:*
‘And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues’.

Paul believes and tells us that all believers can speak in tongues, he said in 1 Corinthians 14:5
"I would like every one of you to speak in tongues"

And, in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15, Paul goes on to say, 'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. 15 So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding'.

In these verses, I believe we have the answer to what speaking in tongues is about and why God should have chosen such a strange phenomenon to accompany Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is prayer, with or in the spirit; it is our spirit speaking to God inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is when a Christian speaks to God, but instead of speaking in a language that is known to ones intellect it is in an almost childlike faith, putting all trust in God to provide the form of words. The regenerated human spirit is joined to the Holy Spirit and intimate prayers are said to God the Father. Praying in tongues helps you to concentrate on God and what is being prayed for.

A quote from Hamlet; those of you who know the words of Hamlet by memory will know this is Act iii scene iii when the King says: (I can't do this in a Gielgud or Jacobi style)

My words fly up,
My thoughts remain below;
Words without thoughts
Never go to heaven.

Thus, speaking in tongues helps our thoughts below to fly up to heaven.

In my work and in my training for the Priesthood I have been through the Myers Briggs personality tests and I was found to be an 'ENFP'

Extraversion (E), intuition (N), feeling (F), perception (P)

Therefore I am an extrovert who is intuitive, does things based on feelings and is perceptive. In looking at the various personalities someone light heartedly put prayers to each personality type.

For one personality type, their prayer is "*Lord give me patience, give it right now*"

However the prayer that goes with my personality type is:

'Lord, help me keep my mind on one thi... ooh look a bird... ing at a time.

Praying in tongues can help your mind focus on God and what the prayer envelops. And wow! Do I need this gift!

Using the gift of tongues expresses a personal verbal intimacy with God, providing a whole new dimension in a person's prayer life.

Rosemary Atlee wrote:

*"How can I describe the heart of the spirit, but as a **love language** for the Father's ear? An intimate language springing to the lips in times of pain, grief and fear, as well as joy. It is not only a superb piece of practical equipment, but in its use there seems to be a pervasive and wholesome aroma of the Holy Spirit, a fragrance my spirit breaths in."*

This **love language** is described as “the song of angels” in Paul’s great oratory on love. In 1 Corinthians 13, he declares: “*if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I have become a resounding gong or clashing symbol.*”

Here we can see that Paul is differentiating between the tongues of ‘men’ (mankind of course) and the tongues of angels. Tongues of ‘men’ is seen by many to be as described in Acts 2: 1-13 when the crowds could hear the disciples speaking in their own particular languages, but the tongue of angels is seen as referring to the phenomenon described in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14, this is the charismatic ability to express one’s devotion to God in the language of the angels, God inspired personal worship and prayers. Can you imagine being lifted up with the angels and praising God with all your being. Beyond, beyond anything earthly – it is transcendental and so powerful.

As I have preached on spiritual gifts I have emphasised how they are given in order to build up the body of Christ – his Church on this earth; they are given to bind members together in unity. The spirit’s role is to bestow gifts for the edification of all and to put each member on an equal footing with all others. In truth, it is more than ‘equality’ that matters; it is important that every member is gifted and is indispensable to the body. The ‘eye’ may be aware of its own importance, but it cannot function without the other parts, it is useless on its own.

The gift of tongues strengthens and repairs each individual part, when we become weak we can draw strength from God, so when each individual member comes together the body of Christ is made stronger.

So let’s not be afraid, let each of one us pray for the gift of tongues to draw each one of us closer to God and strengthen us in the body of Christ – his church.

Let us pray that we can be enabled to worship and praise with the angels as only those lifted up can. Amen

Resources used:

The Holy Spirit and You: Dennis and Rita Bennett

SCM Core Text – Paul: Geoffrey Harris

God working with God: Warren Hunter

The Message of 1 Corinthians: David Prior

Come Holy Spirit: David Pytches

Know your spiritual Gifts: Mark Stible