

**Do not forbid**

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**Speaking  
In  
Tongues**



**John Goodwin**



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# **Do Not Forbid Speaking In Tongues**

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A bible based guide to the gift by  
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# Introduction

*“Now about Spiritual Gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.”*

*1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 1.*

Is there any topic more controversial in the modern church than the Holy Spirit gift of “Speaking in Tongues”? It seems this is one of the most debated and misunderstood aspects of spiritual life. There are those who say the gift of tongues, together with other spiritual gifts, does not exist at all today - that the gift ended when the Canon of Scripture was completed, or when the original twelve apostles died.

Even among those who acknowledge that speaking in tongues is still in use today there is inconsistent teaching about the nature, context and purpose of the gift. When is it used? How does it work? Answers to these questions are diverse!

This book is an apologetic. It is for those who are not sure whether The Gift of Tongues is something Christians will experience or should pursue in this time. It should also be useful for those who want to understand the gift in its various manifestations, and also for those pursuing the gift of tongues for their own walk with the Lord. This is a good thing to do. Seek the gift and the giver - as Paul instructs us clearly: “Eagerly desire spiritual gifts....”.

I will give my understanding of what answers the Bible gives us to the common questions and try to lay out simply what is really a vital and multi-faceted gift from the Spirit of God.

I believe we have been given something of immense value in the gifts of the Spirit, and tongues is vitally important in several ways. Let’s ask Him for understanding and not be ignorant about spiritual gifts.

John



# 1

## Is it for today?

First, let's consider whether or not the Holy Spirit is still gifting His people in this modern age with the set of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, about which Paul implores us not to be ignorant.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost and created such a scene, Peter spoke and explained. He declared about receiving the Holy Spirit that the promise is “for you, your children and all who are far off, for all whom the Lord will call.” (Acts chapter 2, verse 39). I have always considered myself, as someone called to relationship with the Lord, to be part of this group. I feel that I have the qualifications to be included in the claim made by the apostle. I am far off from where this message was given. I have been called by the Lord in to salvation - chosen by Him, as the New Testament tells me.

When my wife and I were new Christians it was easy to understand. “Repent and be baptized and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

The book of 1 Corinthians to my understanding is a book which still applies for the church today. The scripture is still relevant: “All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching” Paul informs Timothy. (2 Timothy 3:16) This indicates that the scripture on gifts of the Spirit, The Gift of Tongues, is relevant today too.

The fact that the teaching on gifts exists and persists to this day indicates that the gift is still in effect, still available and to be eagerly desired. Until “the perfect comes” the gifts won't pass away. Simply put, why would the information in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14

be included in the canon of scripture, if we are to edit it out again, or if it is not relevant for the church today?

Paul says, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:39) so let's consider and take in what scripture says about the gift.

# 2

## **Different kinds of tongues.**

I realize that this phrase - "there are different kinds of tongues" - stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verses 10 and 28 can mean that there are different kinds of languages given by the Holy Spirit, even as there are different kinds of languages in the world. One speaks French, one speaks Swahili, etc. So with spiritual tongues or languages. They don't all sound the same. So the meaning could be limited to different words/syllables/sounds used in speaking in tongues.

However Paul uses the same phrase concerning gifts: "There are different kinds of gifts...." (1 Corinthians 12, verse 4). He is explaining that each of the gifts of the Spirit are different, but they come from one and the same Spirit. He also says, there are different kinds of tongues, which are also from one and the same Spirit.

This is how the gift of tongues works in its various kinds of manifestations. There are different kinds of tongues in the same way that there are different kinds of gifts. Paul is not saying that one person speaks one way and another person speaks a different "tongue" - but one person may speak in tongues for a different purpose, depending on the situation and what kind of tongue is useful in that situation.

In the same way that there are different kinds of wrenches in a tool



kit yet they are all wrenches, they serve different purposes, and work in slightly different ways. One is an open ended wrench - a spanner. Another is a socket wrench. Another is an adjustable wrench and another is a monkey wrench. All these are the same kind of tool and each one is given to the mechanic at the appropriate time for the purpose of the work that is to be done. The analogy works with the gift of tongues.

This precious gift works in three ways. Three kinds of manifestation of the Spiritual gift, coming from the same Lord who works these gifts in all believers - each involving speaking in tongues.

### ***A known language***

The first kind of tongue is seen in Acts Chapter 2, where the believers are baptized in the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Those around realized that something significant and unusual, even strange, was going on. They commented "how is it that we hear them speaking in languages we understand, even though they are not educated?"

At the same time, though, others commented that the disciples must be drunk. Someone remarked that it was only nine o'clock in the morning, so they couldn't be drunk. I do wonder what kind of spectacle they made, and how they behaved, apart from just speaking, that made the onlookers accuse them of being drunk. What was their manner? How did they behave physically that got people's attention?

I have wondered whether the miraculous move of God in this scene was actually working in a different way to how we normally assume on first look at the story. Did they actually speak in those foreign languages? Or did they speak unknown languages given by God, and those other people, through the power of the Spirit, were given understanding of what was being said by the disciples of Jesus? There is that ancient prophecy, "through men of strange tongues I will speak to them...." (Isaiah 28:11).

After all, some of the people there just heard them making fools of

themselves and looking like they were drunk. Let's just take it that this was a first of one kind of manifestation of tongues - the ability to speak in a language of the earth but without learning it - imparted by God.

I have heard of modern day situations where this has happened, but it is a rare gift. I want to emphasize that point, because some people would limit the gift of tongues to only that kind of use - speaking a foreign language that you did not learn so that you can share the gospel with people you could not otherwise talk to. Yet this is the only example in the Bible where this happens. Yes, there are stories about this happening in some missionary ventures in some parts of the world, but it is *extremely rare*. As I know from first hand experience and from speaking with other missionaries, the work of learning the language of the country that God calls you to can be a long and difficult process. Do you know anyone personally who has had this experience? It does not seem to be the way that God commonly works. Usually there is work involved learning a language involved in serving Him in a foreign culture. There is a cost involved in serving Him - ask any missionary or leader!

The Lord can give that ability whenever He chooses, but this miracle impartation does not match up with Paul saying, "I want you all to speak in tongues." (1 Corinthians 14:5).

By the way, it is a shame that many take the following phrase from that verse, "but I would rather you prophesy" to argue against speaking in tongues at all. In other words, Paul is not saying, "I'd rather you prophesy please, so please don't go speaking in tongues...." The suggestion that Prophecy is a more desirable gift in a church service and we should not have tongues at all is not a Biblical position! However churches that don't want tongues for the most part won't have that gift - or the gift of prophecy!

### ***Praying in an unknown language.***

Let's look at another kind of gift of tongues from 1 Corinthians 14, verse 2.

When Paul says, "I want you all to speak in tongues" it is far-fetched to imagine that he is really effectively saying, "I want you all to become missionaries, travel to faraway places where they speak a different language, and get that language supernaturally imparted to you from God so you can glorify God in the hearing of those who would otherwise not be able to understand you."

The context of Paul's request in this passage from 1 Corinthians chapter 11 to chapter 14 is about orderly worship in a meeting or service with believers. Clearly Paul is exhorting believers in church to speak in tongues, using the gift in the ways explained in other parts of this lengthy passage.

Most of the biblical manifestations of the gift of tongues are clearly seen to be speaking a language from God where there is no need to speak an earthly language for clarity or understanding. Only the Acts chapter 2 example would be speaking earthly languages.

In Acts chapter 19, beginning at verse 1 we read the story of a group of disciples who have "never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." Whether, as some think, they are disciples of the teaching of John the Baptist and not yet Christians, or they are actually Christians already is not very clear. (It's hard to understand how they have never heard of the Holy Spirit, even as John's disciples, since he preached that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit!). That question, though, does not affect the present point: After Paul lays hands on them the Holy Spirit comes on them and they all speak in tongues (and prophesy). The question is, "Why do they?" There is no need for an impartation of a language in order to communicate with each other. They have already had a lengthy conversation and understood each other perfectly well.

This manifestation of the gift of Tongues is a second kind of tongue, where believers do "not speak to people, but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit." (1 Corinthians 14:2). This kind of tongue does not need to be interpreted because God understands it, and the speech is not to the people who may be within earshot. The fact that it is occurring in

the hearing of others does not mean that there must be an interpretation, or that the people speaking in tongues should keep quiet. They are manifesting the Holy Spirit, as He is giving them the power to do so. It is a simplistic and legalistic response to say that every time you hear someone speaking in tongues you must also hear an interpretation. If you hear someone praying to God in their own native tongue, which is foreign to you and you don't understand, would you go to them and say, "You must interpret for me what I have just heard you praying, because I didn't understand it."? No! How rude! The person was not talking to you! And what if they don't actually speak your language? So you can hear someone else praying to God and not understand it and not need an interpretation.

Another scripture that indicates this kind of praying in tongues says, "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church." (1 Corinthians 14:4)

This kind of tongues, praying directly to God in a language that we don't understand is, in my experience, the most common. I think there are a number of reasons for that.

First, in natural terms, among those who believe in tongues it is the most often taught gift. Some would even say, "if you don't speak in tongues you are not filled with the Holy Spirit." This is contrary to Biblical teaching of course, as there are many examples where the Holy Spirit is moving yet people are not speaking in tongues and tongues is never stated to be a pre-requisite to receiving salvation.

The Bible says that you cannot confess Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit. This causes problems for those who say "if you don't speak in tongues you are not filled with the Spirit. The false logic relies on the notion that you can say the words "Jesus is Lord" and even think you mean them, but that you really don't mean them, because you have not spoken in tongues, therefore you cannot mean the words and therefore you cannot be saved.

Lord save us from those who are wise in their own eyes, who put

this religious yoke on people who love you!  
Were the disciples saved before Pentecost?  
Was the thief on the cross that day saved?  
Was the lame man with the four friends who lowered him through  
a roof saved after Jesus had forgiven his sins?  
Or the thief on the cross?

Another reason that the gift is more prevalent in the form of personal prayer language directly between the believer and God is because out of all the nine gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12, this particular manifestation of the Spirit is the only one which is given directly for the benefit of the believer. It is a gift to the believer, not through the believer, as are the others.

Gifts of healing are to heal someone else. Gifts of prophecy are to speak to someone else. All the gifts, except praying in tongues, are through you to someone. Tongues as a prayer language is through the Spirit for you. If you pray in a tongue you build yourself up. The reality is I will need to be built up to do the work of the Master and see the manifestation of His Kingdom in my life. Jude 20 encourages us to pray in the spirit (or Spirit) at all times and be built up in our most holy faith.

Because this gift is so valuable for us as individuals, I believe that God would not withhold it from anyone who is earnestly seeking it and seeking Him. There may be reasons why the gift does not flow so easily for some people, particularly previous involvement in occult practices, but most people I have prayed with to receive this gift have received it to some extent. It is a gift to be exercised and which can grow stronger. God, of course, is not a preferrer of persons. He will give equally to those who are asking Him. As Jesus said, "if you who are evil know how to give your children good gifts, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

## ***Tongues and Interpretation***

In the list of nine spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul lists "Interpretation of tongues" as a gift distinct from "Speaking in tongues" - two separate manifestations of the Holy Spirit. In the beginning of 1 Corinthians chapter 14 Paul explains that someone speaking in tongues is uttering mysteries - talking to God. Later he implores those who speak in tongues to interpret. There is a different expectation: "Speak in tongues and either give or hear an interpretation."

This is really like a two part prophecy. When someone speaks a prophetic word they speak for the encouragement and edification of those who hear (see 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 3). It is the same with a prophetic message spoken in tongues and interpreted.

Even among those who are used to seeing the manifestation of Spiritual gifts however, people can get a little tense when it happens, because it is a bit out of the ordinary. It could be seen as weird! People are not sure that it's being done right, and "what if there is no interpretation?" I believe these are the real reasons that the gift is less common, rather than because God is not giving the gift.

I was once in a service where the pastor rebuked a woman who spoke in tongues, because no interpretation was given. It was determined not to be God-inspired only because of the lack of an interpretation. But wait a minute.... What if there was a person who had the interpretation but he or she just didn't speak up and say it? It wasn't the fault of the woman speaking out in tongues. Or what if she had never been taught that she could pray for and give the interpretation? Actually, spiritual gifts are spiritually discerned, not by a written rule.

What if she did get it wrong, and it actually wasn't a word from God? I don't think chastising or rebuking people is necessary in that situation. It is better, in my opinion, to thank the person for "going for it" - taking the risk in front of everyone to speak out in

tongues for God. After all, if someone is learning to preach and they don't preach an amazing sermon, you don't yell at them, do you? If someone is learning to ride a bike and they fall, they won't do better next time by being scolded! "You shouldn't have fallen off that bike! You are out of order....!"

I have heard this kind of gift in church services many times. A wonderful manifestation of this gift was given by the Lord when I was leading worship in a service with a large congregation made up of people from many different churches. Not all of the people were used to experiencing the gifts of the Spirit. Or at least not all were used to hearing people speak in tongues in their services. During a pause in the worship, as we all waited on the Lord, in what felt like a "Holy Moment" a man spoke out loudly from the crowd. You could see the pastors of various denominations on the front row tense up immediately. But after a bit of explanation for everybody about what had just happened, the person who spoke out in tongues - clearly it had not been something he had prayed between himself and God, but had spoken out loudly for all to hear - gave the interpretation. At that point, where the interpretation is given, it is clearly a prophetic word from the Lord for the church. There was a strong sense of God's presence in that meeting, and those who did not normally have the experience of tongues were not offended, did not run or judge those who do. I am quite sure it started some interesting conversations, but unity in the body was preserved. It is a great thing when we are not easily offended, even when we see things we do not understand, or we suspect are not from God.

## ***What to do?***

# 3

So, there are different kinds of tongues:

- A language for others to understand and hear about God

- A language spoken out in a congregational meeting, inspired by God, which must be interpreted in order to edify the church.
- A prayer language between God and the individual believer.

The first of these three kinds is very rare in my opinion and experience.

The second kind, speaking a prophecy in tongues is not particularly uncommon.

The third kind of tongue is a prayer language given graciously by God - a gift which is actually for the believer.

Other gifts of the Spirit are given through the believer. If, for example, you are given a spiritual gift of healing, it is from God, through you to heal someone else - the gift is for them. In speaking in tongues we are building ourselves up (1 Corinthians 14:4, Jude 20), which is necessary in order to be strong workers in the Kingdom of our God.

## ***Yes but...***

### **“Only two or three should speak....”**

When the scripture says, "If anyone speaks in a tongue two or three should speak...." Paul is simply saying that with prophecy in tongues, as with prophecy in your own language, two or three is enough.

When he says, "do all prophesy?" he doesn't mean they can't, he just means that not everyone in the room is going to get up and speak a prophetic word. When he says, two prophets should speak, he means people who are actual "Prophets", large "P", as referred to in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 11, not people using the gift of prophecy. Two prophets speaking in one meeting is going to be as



much meat as you can take. Then you'll have to chew it a bit before you take some more!

**“It says, ‘do all speak in tongues’?”**

As above, it doesn't mean all cannot speak in tongues, only that not everyone is going to prophecy in tongues.

**“But we should seek the giver, not the gift....”**

If someone is telling you this, explain to them that to refuse the gift of the Giver is a bit rude! Really, this is one of those escape clauses, that lets people get out of the awkward truth that is actually written in the Bible: “Eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (1 Corinthians 14, verse 1). The truth is we need to seek the Giver and the gifts.

All of these instructions are meant to be common sense guidelines for people who are already experiencing the gifts of the Spirit in their meetings. The passages from 1 Corinthians 11 to the end of 14 lay out guidelines for “church meetings” - i.e. for meetings when believers come together. The purpose is to ensure that there is order, but also to make sure that there is room for Spiritual gifts to be used which will both bless the believers and encourage them, as well as honour the Lord of the gifts.

The purpose of these passages is not to create a set of rules with which to trap people and point out when they're doing it wrong. So, for example, if you have a room full of people who all pray in tongues at the same time - pray, or "speak to God", not speak out to the congregation - there is no direction here from Paul that prohibits it. The point is, when people are speaking to the congregation it needs to be something useful. When people are speaking to God, he can handle it if everyone speaks at the same time. He's already taking up prayers from all over the world simultaneously.

As Paul says, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." (1 Corinthians 14, 39 - 40)

# 4

## ***How to receive the Gift of Tongues***

First, are you a follower of Jesus? A believer? If not, make that the first step. If you are a believer you have the Holy Spirit living in you already. You cannot be a real believer without the Holy Spirit. Yet scripture indicates in several places that a person can be a believer and still not manifest gifts of the Spirit. I am attempting to not use common Christian phraseology here, for the sake of clarity for all. But if it were expressed in common “Christianese” I would say that you can be a believer and not be baptized in the Holy Spirit, and that you can be baptized in the Holy Spirit and still not experience that gift of speaking in tongues. For the scriptural unfolding of this in the book of Acts, see these passages: Acts 1:8, Acts 2:38, Acts 8:14-17, Acts 10:44-48, Acts 19:1-7.

I strongly recommend reading these scriptures first. Then follow these steps:

Jesus said, “if you [fathers] who are evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” (Luke 11:13)

So it is this simple: Ask, believe, confess - ABC.

A. The word of God in the Bible says to eagerly desire spiritual gifts. Pray and tell God how you feel, and what your desire is. Ask Him specifically for the gift of tongues.

B. Believe that when you ask, God hears you and will answer. His word says, “I want all of you to speak in tongues.” (1 Corinthians 14:5).

C. Confess with your lips. Simply begin to speak out. Go for it! Start to speak, not in your own native tongue, but in whatever words come to your lips. Ideally not to your mind! When you pray in the Spirit, your spirit prays, not your mind (See 1 Corinthians 14:14). This is the point where it gets a little difficult for some people. The thoughts (problem!) begin to rush in - "This is not God, I'm doing it myself....."

"I can't do this...."

"It's not working....."

If it is foolishness, my attitude has always been that I don't mind being foolish for God. I'm going for what he has for me and wants me to have or do.

This is also where the devil will stand opposing you and tell you those same things: "This isn't God!" "God doesn't want you to have this gift." "God won't do it for you...."

You will know for sure though, that the Holy Spirit of God begins quickly to guide your tongue. You can feel it. You can sense it. The words are no longer your own, but imparted from the Spirit Himself!

At this point keep going! Pray in the spirit and pray without ceasing. If you only got a few words you will get more. Keep going.

Perhaps it will be good to establish in your mind, for example by re-reading the scriptures mentioned earlier from Acts, that indeed this is a work of God. He does absolutely want you to have this gift. No wonder the devil opposes you. - he's scared! This prayer language you seek will build you up and give you a direct prayer communication with God.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.





