

The Gift of Tongues



Gifts of the Spirit (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today sharing with you about the precious and wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit. Yesterday I spoke to you about the first of the vocal gifts, the gift of prophecy. Today, I'm going to speak to you about the gift that many people find the most difficult to understand, the gift of tongues. We need to bear in mind that in the language of the New Testament, the word "tongue" also meant "language." So you can call it the gift of tongues or you can call it the gift of languages. Usually, it's referred to as the gift of unknown tongues, but in most cases in the original Greek, the word "unknown" is not actually there in the text, although the context indicates that it must have been an unknown tongue or an unknown language.

Now, we need to look at some general principles about the tongue to understand some of the problems—the tongue is the problem member of the body. It's the one that causes at least 50% of all the problems in our lives. James 3:8 says:

> "But no man can tame the tongue..."

No man can fully control his own tongue. What is our tongue given to us for? In the Psalms, David calls his tongue "my glory." Why does he call it his glory? The answer is that the supreme purpose of the human tongue is to glorify God. That's the reason why the tongue was put in our mouth in the first place. Consequently, every use of the tongue that does not glorify God is a misuse. I doubt whether any of us, on that basis, would deny that we are frequently guilty of misusing our tongue. The answer is, really, that no human being can fully control his own tongue. That's why we have to have the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit to enable us to use our tongues aright. In Romans 6:13, Paul says:

> "Present your members as instruments of righteousness to God."

In other words, we're to offer to God all the physical members of our body as instruments for Him to use. The most desperately urgent need is to present our tongue to God because that's the member which, above all others, we cannot control.

Now, the first actual instance of speaking in tongues that's recorded took place on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit

descended, the waiting believers were filled with the Holy Spirit; the first immediate result was that they began to speak with other tongues or other languages as the Spirit gave them to speak. This gathered a crowd of Jews from all over the Roman Empire that were there for the celebration of the feast of Pentecost. The Jews understood the languages that the disciples were speaking, but they also knew that the disciples themselves did not. They were just Galileans. So we see clearly that speaking in another tongue or an unknown tongue means that the believer, through the supernatural direction and help of the Holy Spirit, speaks a language which he has not learned and does not understand, but could be understood if there was a person present who knew that language.

In 1 Corinthians 12:10 & 28, Paul refers to this as "kinds of tongues." I understand "kinds" to mean different uses or purposes of tongues. So I'm going to mention three specific, different purposes of tongues. The first use, which I believe is primary and basic, is for direct personal communion with God. In 1 Corinthians 14:2, Paul says:

> "For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries."

That's very clear. When one speaks in an unknown tongue, one is not speaking to men; one is speaking to God; one is speaking from the Spirit; one is speaking mysteries: that is, things that the natural understanding cannot fully comprehend. In two verses further on, Paul says:

> "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself..."

Builds up himself. So, though we do not intellectually understand what we are doing, when we are speaking to God in a tongue, we are speaking mysteries and we are building ourselves up spiritually. Paul goes on again in 1 Corinthians 14:14 & 15.

> "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also."

Paul indicates there is more than one way of praying. There's one way of praying with the spirit when we do not know with our minds what we are saying. There's another way of praying with our mind, when our mind is fully aware of what we are saying. Paul says both ways are legitimate. We need both ways. He says, "I shall pray with the spirit." He says, "I shall pray with the mind also."

My own background, before I came to know the Lord Jesus personally, was that of a philosopher. I was a professional philosopher, and I studied languages, and I studied books, and I traveled, and I indulged in the arts, and I was interested in music and painting and poetry, and all sorts of things. And yet, there was a deep, inner dissatisfaction in my life which I simply did not understand, and I knew no way to meet that need.

And then, in a very sovereign way, God revealed the Lord Jesus to me, and I received this beautiful ability to speak to God in an unknown tongue. And when that happened, I realized that in my philosophic ignorance, I had completely ignored the most vital part of my own person, which was my spirit. I'd been nourishing my soul, nourishing my body, but starving my spirit. And all this time, my spirit was calling out to express itself and to communicate with God, who is the Father of spirits. And when God gave me this supernatural ability to speak in an unknown tongue, then for the first time, my spirit could freely express itself to God without having to go through the narrow bottleneck of my own little mind. And that brought me the most tremendous inner liberation. Indeed, I realized by reading Scripture that what I was doing was communicating with God; speaking mysteries and building myself up, and I thank God that I have enjoyed this experience almost continuously now almost every day of my life for nearly forty years. I treasure it highly. It's very, very precious to me.

The second use or the second kind of tongues is when an utterance is given out in a public assembly in an unknown tongue and is followed by the interpretation into a known tongue. When that happens, then the combined use of tongues, plus interpretation, is equivalent to the exercise of prophecy. However, in my talk tomorrow, I'm going to deal specifically with the interpretation of tongues, and so I won't go further with that particular use of tongues in my talk today.

So I'll go on to the third use of an unknown tongue or tongues; one which many people are not really very clear about. That is: an unknown tongue as a sign to unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians 14:22, Paul says:

> "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers."

Notice that tongues are for a sign to unbelievers. What's the meaning of that? Well, let's go back for a moment to the day of Pentecost. What happened? The Holy Spirit came on the

disciples, they were filled, they began to speak with tongues they did not know—unknown tongues. But the unbelievers round about, when they gathered, recognized the languages. And they were overwhelmed by the realization that these men spoke languages perfectly and fluently, which they themselves understood, but the men who were speaking them did not understand and, consequently, their attention was arrested and they were made ready to receive the message that Peter went on to preach to them. So that's tongues as a sign to unbelievers. It's unusual, but it's something that has not ceased.

I know a church in a certain city in the United States, an Episcopal church, where there was a lady whose delight and ministry it was to go and visit the sick in a certain hospital. As she was walking through the rooms one day, she came to man sitting propped up in bed who looked very dark and unhappy. So she went over to him and began to speak to him and discovered that he didn't understand English. Now this lady had more faith than a lot of the rest of us, so she decided just to speak in an unknown tongue. She didn't know what tongue she was speaking, but she just began to speak and the man's face brightened up and he began to listen. And he answered her in the same language and she answered him and they had a conversation. And the whole attitude of that man was changed. Later, she discovered that she'd been speaking Canary Island Spanish. That was his mother tongue. She was able to find somebody who spoke Spanish, and that person was able to come and minister to the man in his own understanding; but it was the initial use of the unknown tongue that had arrested the man's attention and made him open to the message of the gospel.

Or, I could go back to an earlier part of my life when I was pastoring a church in London; and each Sunday evening, for what we called the gospel service, our daughters and other members of the church would bring in people who were interested. One day our eldest daughter, named Tikva, brought in a young man from Wales, whose mother tongue was Welsh. Well, we went through the service and I preached my message and before I knew what was happening, an elderly man in the congregation, who was known to all of us, stood up and began to speak very clearly and distinctly in an unknown tongue. Well, I was a little frustrated. I really thought he'd interrupted me and spoiled my message, but the young man turned to our daughter and said, "Why is that man telling everybody about my sins in public?" It took us all about ten minutes to convince that young man from Wales that the older man didn't know a word of Welsh, and didn't even know what language he was speaking. Believe me, the attention of that young man was arrested that day, and let me tell you, he later married the young lady who brought him to the meeting and is now one of my sons-in-law. So that's an interesting example of the use of tongues as a sign to unbelievers.

All right, our time is up for today, but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow, I'll be dealing with the third vocal gift, the one I referred to in my talk today, but did not deal with: the gift of interpretation of tongues.

Radio Program

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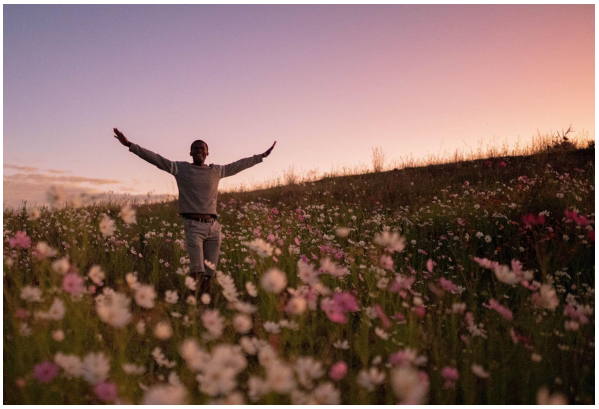

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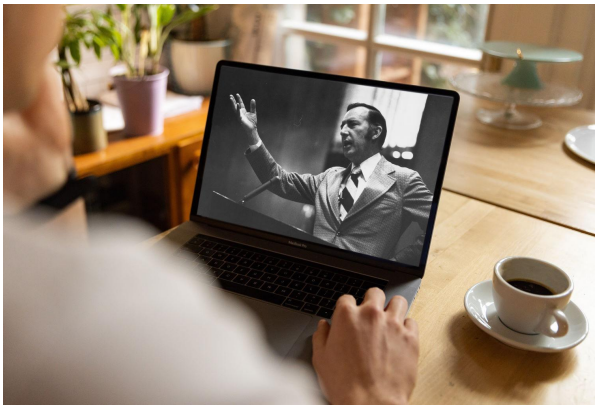

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