

# Interpretation of Tongues



Gifts of the Spirit (Part 10)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again today. Last week and this week, also, I've been sharing with you about the precious and wonderful gifts of the Holy Spirit. In my talk yesterday, I dealt with the gift that many people find the most difficult to understand, the gift of tongues. Today, I'm going to speak about the gift that goes directly with the gift of tongues. In fact, the gift I'm going to deal with today has no meaning apart from the gift on tongues. It's the gift of interpretation of tongues. By simple logic, there can be no need for the use of this gift of interpretation unless it has been preceded with a tongue; that is, an unknown tongue that needs to be interpreted.

Let me first define "interpretation" in the light of that. Interpretation is the ability, supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit, to present in a known language the meaning of something that has previously been given out in an unknown language. Now, the person who brings the interpretation may be the same person who gave the utterance in the unknown tongue or it may be another person. The Scripture leaves room for either possibility.

Essentially, the purpose of interpretation of tongues as thus defined is the same as that of prophecy. For example, in 1 Corinthians 14:4 & 5, Paul says this:

> "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying."

The test of the use of these gifts is edifying. How much edifying do they achieve? Now, speaking in an unknown tongue edifies the one who speaks, but nobody else. But prophesying edifies the church, the assembled company of believers. Therefore, prophesying is said to be greater than speaking in tongues because it edifies a greater number of people.

Now, when tongues is followed by interpretation, then the meaning of the tongue is communicated to the people who can hear and understand, and as a result, it accomplishes the same effect as prophesying would do. So it puts tongues, plus interpretation, essentially on the same level as prophesying.

Then again, in 1 Corinthians 14:12 & 13, Paul goes on to say this:

> "So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church [Notice the ultimate purpose is edification. Then he goes on to say:] Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret."

Now, why should he pray that? Because he should be desiring to edify others besides himself. Speaking in a tongue, he edifies himself, but when he prophesies or when he interprets what he's spoken in a tongue, he edifies others.

Now, you may say, "Well, isn't that rather strange that God will give first an unknown tongue and then an interpretation? Why couldn't God just give the prophecy or the interpretation straight away?" Well, ultimately, I think there are some questions that we'll have to get answered direct from God. But let me give you three reasons why I see that this is practical.

First of all, if God gives to one the utterance in an unknown tongue and to another the interpretation, He is promoting the interdependence of the members and that's one of the great aims of gifts. Paul, after speaking about the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, goes on to speak about the body and its members and one of his main points is that every member needs the other members. So when one speaks in a tongue, but the interpretation is given through another, each of those members needs the other for the final result.

Secondly, generally speaking, speaking in a tongue that's not understood by the mind dethrones the human intellect and thus makes room for God's sovereignty. One of our problems in the church is that, in many cases we've run things simply on the level of our own intellect. Everything we'd had to work out in reason before we would accept it, but God operates on a higher level than our intellect; and one of the ways that God operates to bring us down from the enthroning of human intellect, is to minister in an unknown language where the poor human mind has to stand back and say, "I just don't know what's being said." That's very good and very healthy for most of us who trust too much in our intellect.

Another practical reason is that it sometimes happens in a meeting of God's people that people are not really attentive and ready to hear a prophetic utterance. But if, first, there comes an anointed, articulate, authoritative utterance in an unknown tongue, it arrests people's attention. They realize God is trying to get through and say something. And, if people are properly trained in such a situation, when that kind of utterance comes in an unknown tongue, there should be silence and everybody should be in a prayerful, attentive attitude; waiting and praying for the interpretation. So, that's a third reason why sometimes it's practical for God to operate through a tongue and an interpretation and not merely through a prophecy, because people are not always ready to receive a prophecy, but a tongue will prepare the way for them to receive an interpretation.

Now I'm going to look at the regulations for the exercise of both prophecy and interpretation which Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 14. It's important to understand that these gifts need to be regulated. Paul begins in verse 26:

> "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."

Notice, again, that the ultimate purpose is always edification. And through these supernatural gifts, when God's people come together, each one can have something given from God to contribute. Nobody needs to sit by, passive and silent, just listening to other people. It makes every member of the body potentially active. Then Paul goes on to say about speaking in a tongue:

> "If any one speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God."

Paul says a public utterance in an unknown tongue is out of place in the assembly unless it is to be followed by interpretation. So, the person who gives such an utterance either should be able to interpret it himself or be confident that there is another person present who can give the interpretation. Otherwise, it's legitimate for that person to speak in a tongue, but not out loud. Paul says, "...let him speak to himself and to God." There are some people who just don't realize that it's not necessary to speak out loud in an unknown tongue. It's perfectly legitimate to do it to yourself. Then Paul goes on to the regulations for prophecy. He says:

> "...let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment."

I've pointed out before, in my talk on prophecy, that prophecy should always be subject to judgment. It should never be accepted uncritically, without being tested. So, when two or three prophets speak, the others with that gift and ministry present are expected to assess the prophecies and say whether they are to be received as from God or not. Both with tongues and interpretation and with prophecy, Paul says, "two or three." I believe the reason is that God doesn't want His people having a meal that consists only of one course. One course could be the exercise of tongues and interpretation or prophecy, but there are many other aspects to the total diet that God has for His people. So He doesn't want His people just to get wrapped up in one particular manifestation and exclude His other provisions for them. Then Paul goes on to say, very remarkably, in verse 31:

> "For you can all prophesy one by one..."

So far as God and Scripture are concerned, it is perfectly possible for all believers to prophesy. "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted." It doesn't mean that the first time a person prophesies, he's going to prophesy like Isaiah. He may stumble and hesitate, and be a little timid, but he can do it in order that he may learn. Then Paul says:

> "...the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets:"

That's very important. When a person is operating in the Holy Spirit, he's always in control of himself. This is a lesson that some of us have had to learn the hard way. A person who does something foolish and out of place and then blames it on the Holy Spirit and says, "The Holy Spirit made me do it!" is out of line with Scripture. The Holy Spirit never makes a child of God do something. The apostle Peter said, "The Holy Spirit bade me go," but he never said, "The Holy Spirit made me go." Evil spirits will take over human personalities and compel them to do things that they don't intend and are not responsible for, but the Holy Spirit will never do that to a person. And then it's all summed up in this statement: "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace as in all the churches of the saints." So we see that the two ultimate objectives of Paul in these directions are, first of all, edification (building up); and secondly, order.

Now I'd just like to say, briefly, how God gave me this gift of interpretation. I came out of a background of philosophy. I was ignorant of spiritual things, but the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to me sovereignly and supernaturally, and filled me with the Holy Spirit; and immediately I found that I had this ability to speak in an unknown tongue. So, every night, as I lay in bed before I went to sleep, I would speak in an unknown tongue and then I would find myself speaking in English, but I wasn't choosing the words that I was saying, and I was amazed at the things I was saying in English. So I turned to the New Testament, because I didn't know where else to turn for an explanation, and I found these phrases: "tongues" and the "interpretation of tongues," and I suddenly realized that God had given me this ability to interpret the tongues that He had previously given me. And I recall now, the first time this ever happened to me, I spoke some words that amazed me and astonished me; but in those words, God gave me a brief preview of His plan for my life. Looking back, almost 40 years later, I have to testify that what God showed me then, through that gift of interpretation, has been progressively fulfilled ever since.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this time, Monday through Friday. Next week I'll be speaking about another of the wonderful ways in which the Holy Spirit blesses God's people. I'll be speaking about the "Fruit of the Spirit." This will serve to balance and round out the teaching that I've been giving these two past weeks on the gifts of the Spirit. But stay tuned now for some important announcements.

## Radio Program

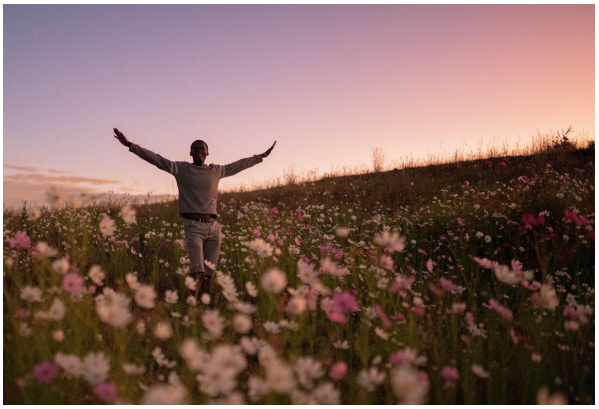
Transcript: TS-R008-105-ENG
Last Updated: 12 Apr 2023
Website: derekprince.com

# Bible Teaching Resources



## Books

Illuminate and expand your understanding of the Bible with the Derek Prince collection of Christian books.



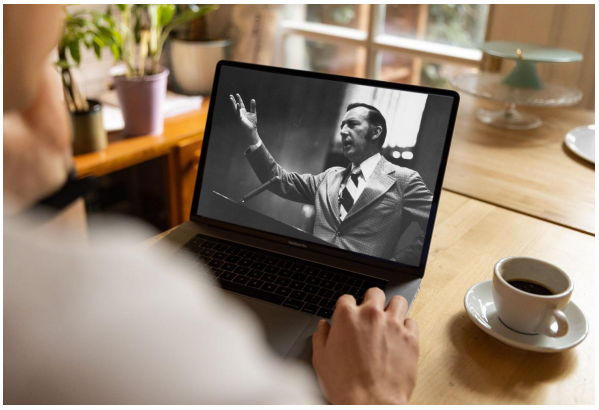
## Daily Devotionals

Browse free biblically inspired daily devotionals by Derek Prince for practical teachings to uplift your Christian faith.



## Legacy Radio

Listen to inspiring 10-minute messages and connect faith to life with the Derek Prince Legacy Radio podcast.



## Sermons

Watch original and digitally remastered sermons by Derek Prince. Includes full message transcripts (free download).



## Official App

Available free, download the official Derek Prince Ministries app and equip your faith, anywhere, anytime.



## Proclamations

Declare life and experience the transformative power of God's Word with our bible-based Proclamations.

Copyright © Derek Prince Ministries