

TONGUES OF FIRE

Session 4 – The Interpretation of Tongues

I. What Is the Interpretation of Tongues?

1. Interpretation

1 Corinthians 12:10 “...to another the interpretation of tongues.”

Interpretation in reference to tongues is only mentioned seven times in the New Testament: 1 Cor 12:10, 30; 14:5, 13, 26, 27; 14:28 (interpreter). Each of these uses assumes that one knows what is meant by “interpretation of tongues.” Well, what is interpretation of tongues? It is the interpretation of tongues; not the interpretation of dreams, revelations, or modern art!

In Session 2 we looked at Daniel’s interpretation of a dream and angelic writing as a type of interpretation of tongues. Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream is also a *type* of interpretation of tongues. But technically, it was an operation of word of wisdom. In the case of Nebuchadnezzar’s first dream (which we didn’t examine), Daniel received the dream through a word of knowledge [Dan 2:19] and its interpretation by a word of wisdom [Dan 2:30].

Dan 2:19-23, 30

19 Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

20 Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

21 And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

22 He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him.

23 I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast now made known unto us the king's matter.

30 But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

Verses 21 and 30 present us with truths that are held in tension. Verse 21 resonates with Matthew 25:29.

Matthew 25:29

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

God expects us to know and understand, to pursue the knowledge of Him and His wisdom. To the degree that we have the word of life stored up in our souls, the Holy Spirit can supernaturally put us in remembrance of it and cause us to make the connections. So it

helps to understand the types and symbols in Scripture and God's prophetic language to be able to interpret dreams and visions. That being said, verse 30 reminds us that revelation is a gift of God and He reveals things to whomsoever He chooses.

Facility in tongues is provided by the utterance of the Holy Spirit but is enhanced by increased speaking on our part. Interpretation and prophecy, because they come by way of the Spirit but also flow through our understanding, are deepened by a goodly storehouse of Scripture.

Matthew 13:51-52

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.

As we are instructed in the truths of the kingdom, the Lord can bring new things out of this treasure trove old things (like understanding the types of tongues and interpretation in the Old Testament) and new (the actual operation of tongues and interpretation in the New Testament church). Drawing these things up is a major function of the inward anointing of the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

The Greek word translated "remembrance" means to remind quietly. The One who inspired the writing of the Holy Writ resonates with and reminds us of the Scripture we have stored up in our minds. He draws from this well when He pours out diverse kinds of tongues and inspires the interpretation.

From the interpretation of dreams and Scripture (hermeneutics – Luke 24:27, *expounded*), we can understand the nature and function of this action. It means to make understandable and clear. Again, this is the interpretation of tongues – not dreams, visions, or modern art. The doctrine of fractured gifts brings with it the fracturing within gifts. Thus, we wind up with perceptive people who say they have the "gift of discernment" or seemingly wise people who declare they have "the gift of interpretation." There are no such manifestation gifts. It is the discerning of *spirits* and the interpretation of *tongues*! When we speak of interpreting dreams and visions, we are in the realm of revelatory gifts, not inspirational gifts.

The interpretation of tongues is the making plain of what has been spoken in a tongue and is accomplished through submission to the will of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor 12:10-11

10 To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:
11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Isa 32:4

The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.

We want to be ready and willing to “speak plainly.” He makes us able.

2. Of Tongues

Interpretation of tongues is an utterance, inspirational gift. It operates “out of the belly” not “from the heart.” Since it is the interpretation of tongues, whatever tongues can be, the interpretation can be.

Interpretation of Tongues Could Be an Interpretation of:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving – 1 Cor 14:14, 17; Eph 6:18; Jude 20• A praise to God – Acts 10:46; 1 Cor 14:16• A tongue of men or angels – 1 Cor 13:1• A melody to the Lord – Eph 5:19; 1 Cor 14:15• A declaration of the wonderful works of God – Acts 2:11• A divine mystery – 1 Cor 14:2• A word to the unbeliever – 1 Cor 14:22-27• A message of edification, exhortation, and comfort – 1 Cor 14:2-5• A teaching or admonishment – 1 Cor 14:6; Col 3:16• A call to battle – 1 Cor 14:8

Note that the gift is called the interpretation of *tongues*, plural. This indicates two truths: one, it generally comes upon us when we have manifested a diverse tongue; two, one may interpret more than one tongue.

3. Spoken and Sung

1 Corinthians 14:15

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

When we receive the interpretation in our prayer closet, the Holy Spirit is working to edify our understanding in the same way He has strengthened our spirit through tongues.

Singing in the spirit can be done either with a song you know (understand) or a truly spiritual song. In a spirit song, the Spirit gives the words and the melody. Much of your proficiency in this will be determined by your musical ability. (This is like storing up words in your soul that the Holy Spirit draws out.) But the beauty of it is that it is a gift of the Spirit, it is supernatural – beyond your natural ability. I have heard people sing beautifully in the Spirit who can't carry a tune in their natural ability. Singing in the Spirit is singing a “new song.”

Ps 40:3

And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

Ps 149:1

Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.

Rev 5:9

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

These sung praises to God not only gladden His heart, they call Him to the battle.

Isaiah 42:10-13

10 Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof.

11 Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.

12 Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands.

13 The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies.

As the Spirit gives you utterance, let Him determine the cadence, harmony, and melody. Don't be surprised if the “song” you sing doesn't sound like a Western composition!

[See also Ps 33:3 (skillfully); 96:1; 98:1; 144:9]

II. Gift and Ministry

1. The Gift – 1 Cor 12:10

The gift of interpretation of tongues is mentioned 9th. Nine is the Scriptural number of fullness, fruitfulness, and finality. Three is the number of divine completeness. 9 being the product of 3 x 3, one could say that it means “completely complete.” Without the interpretation of tongues, our walk by the Spirit will be incomplete. It will not have the fruitfulness that God intended.

A. Interprets Your Tongue

1 Corinthians 14:13-15

13 Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret.

14 For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.

15 What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

“Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue [singular] pray that he may interpret.”

The indication is clear that it is his own tongue that he is praying to interpret. That this gift involves the interpretation of our prayer language is shown in the singular use of “tongue” and the following verses: “I will pray in a tongue” and “I will pray with the spirit.” These uses indicate the interpretation of one’s own tongue in the prayer closet.

1 Corinthians 14:5

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

“He that speaketh with tongues” is in the plural. Here we are in the church context and the use is the speaking out of a diverse tongue. Then it says “except he interpret.” He who? He who had just spoken with tongues.

Can your tongue be interpreted in the church service? Yes, but we need to understand that though others might be blessed at your giving of thanks, the interpretation will be primarily for *your* edification for this is the nature of *your* prayer language. More and more, we should move to the bringing forth of diverse kinds of tongues [which you will begin to recognize coming *upon* you] with interpretation that the church may receive edifying.

B. Conditional Permission

1 Corinthians 14:13 says “pray that he *may* interpret.” This is a conditional clause. Our prayer is that we may be allowed to interpret.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

We have already seen that tongues with interpretation is equivalent to prophecy. Like interpretation, prophecy is done through the anointing upon by the will of the Holy Spirit. We need to desire after that which He longs to impart to us. Have you ever given a gift to someone who didn’t want it? Isn’t there greater joy in giving when you have seen a need and a desire and fulfilled it by granting the gift? It is the same with the Holy Spirit. He has the enablement, but we must bring the desire.

C. Impacts like Prophecy

1 Corinthians 14:3

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

The gift of prophecy brings words of edification, exhortation, and comfort. The language of 1 Cor 14:5, “except he interpret,” lets us know that an interpretation of a tongue brings the same thing.

To edify is to build up. Spiritual utterances should build up, not tear down. Exhortation is to encourage, to win over to the right course of action. A spiritual utterance should build your faith and bring victory in view. To comfort is to console and cheer. Spiritual utterance should lift your spirit, not dash your hopes.

2. The Ministry – 1 Cor 12:28-20

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

28 And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

29 Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?

30 Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

Interpretation is listed in verse 30 in the context of ministries. This list enumerates some of the administrations over which there is the same Lord (1 Cor 12:5). Interpretation is listed 7th. Seven is the number of perfectness, abundance, and fullness. It is the combination of three (the divine) and four (creation) and as such shows the perfect work of God on earth. It is through the interpretation of tongues that God brings the ministries to perfectness, fullness, and abundance and works His perfect work on earth.

A. Given to Some

1 Cor 12:28 says “God hath set some.” Whereas the gift is universal, the ministry is not. It is given to “some.”

While the ministry of diverse kinds of tongues is seen and felt through the ministry of intercession in the church, we really haven’t seen a full release of the ministry of interpretation. Experientially, its full impact and scope are unknown. Scripturally, since we know that it is the interpretation of tongues, we may safely assume that one with this ministry would excel in making plain what is said and what occurs when they or others speak in a tongue or tongues.

B. Flows with Diverse Kinds of Tongues

That this ministry flows with diverse kinds of tongues is seen in its combination with “speak with tongues” in 1 Cor 12:30. That one would have a ministry of interpretation would imply a facility in diverse kinds of tongues as well by nature of the complimentary facets of these gifts and ministries.

C. Operates in Public

The primary context of 1 Corinthians 14 is the operation of gifts and ministries in the church. The very nature of ministries is that they administer publicly. Who ever heard of an apostle sent to himself? No, God set these ministries in the church. It is a public office.

1 Corinthians 14:27-28

27 If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret.

28 But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

“If there be no interpreter” in verse 28 refers to someone with the ministry of interpretation. This is the individual one who is allowed to interpret. The protocol would be that if the Spirit comes upon you with a diverse tongue, speak it out loud. Then be quite and wait on the Lord to see if there is one there who can interpret. If after the third such speaking there is no interpretation forthcoming, the admonition is then for that person to be quite and sit down.

As a general rule, the gift of interpretation is used to interpret your own tongue and the ministry of interpretation is put in place to interpret the tongues of others. Again, this is a general rule. Could you give an interpretation of somebody else’s tongue through the gift of interpretation? Absolutely! Who would dare put God in a box? One with a ministry of interpretation may also interpret their own tongue.

The grace of God and His giftings are multifaceted. He gives us general guidelines so we know how to engage our faith and have some idea of what to expect. But never forget that God is God. He can prophecy through you as well as a pagan sorcery or a donkey!

3. Operation in the Church

A. It Is for the Edification of the Church

1 Cor 14:5, 12, 26

5 I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, **that the church may receive edifying.**

12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, **seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.**

26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. **Let all things be done unto edifying.**

B. Tongues Are to Be Interpreted if Uninstructed Ones Are Present

1 Corinthians 14:22-23

22 Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

When I was an “unlearned” one, I had opportunity to be in congregations that both interpreted and didn’t interpret when they spoke in tongues. I must admit that I found both contexts to be odd. What were these people doing? But in the church where they didn’t interpret, I thought they were just yelling gibberish at each other. People walked up to the ministry line and the elders of the church would assault them with laying on of hands and screaming in tongues and the people usually fell over. My reaction? I’m not going up there!

When I first heard tongues with interpretation, I still thought the tongues were weird. But when they interpreted, I changed my mind and decided they had just spoken from the Greek Bible and then read it in English! The point is that I didn’t think they were crazy.

The Bible says to lay hands suddenly on no man.¹ We should no more spout off in tongues to the unbeliever and the unlearned without interpretation than we would lay hands on one who doesn’t want deliverance.

C. Decently and in Order

1 Corinthians 14:40 “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

Anyone with common sense or a halfway decent upbringing knows what “decently and in order” means. You shouldn’t even have to break out your concordance. Our God is a God of order, a God who works through authority structures for all authority ultimately comes from Him.

We need to be aware of the flow of the service as well as the leading of the Holy Spirit. He often prepares you to give a word before it is time to give it. When you sense Him come upon you, wait for the right time and the release. Often times I have been in a service and the Holy Spirit will say, “I want you to sing, I want you to sing” and I can feel the melody come on me and a great zeal to be released. But I don’t break out in song in the middle of someone’s prayer or teaching or prophecy. I wait and stand up under the anointing until the moment when He says in essence “I want you to sing NOW.”

Many large congregations have established the protocol that words must be brought to those in charge of the service before they are allowed to be spoken to the entire church. If you are in such a church, respect the protocol. Understanding that these are utterance gifts we are talking about, you won’t typically have the entire word to vet out with the leadership. This kind of structure is friendly to prophets but hard on believers who simply feel the unction to bring a word. If it is simply an unction to bring a word that you feel, then go to the leadership and say, “I feel the Holy Spirit has

¹ 1 Tim 5:22

a tongue and an interpretation for me to speak out.” Then let them decided whether or not they will release you. If they ask, “What is the word?” tell them, “I won’t know until I speak!”

God uses these kinds of situations to train us to His timing and to teach us submission and obedience. I’ve had Him give me words for the simple lesson of being denied the privilege of speaking them! Walking by the Spirit isn’t only speaking for Him but also knowing when to be silent in obedience to Him and the authorities He has established in the church.

Be sensitive the Holy Spirit. When the anointing comes upon you, speak it out. If at the end of your tongue there isn’t a word of interpretation – be quite! Don’t be fearful or embarrassed. Allow the Spirit of God to work in the congregation. We need to learn to wait on the Lord and not be scared of silent moments. He may give you the interpretation, but He may also have reserved that privilege to someone else to teach all in the body that we need each other.

III. Receiving the Interpretation of Tongues

1. Pray to Interpret – 1 Cor 14:13

1 Corinthians 14:13

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue **pray that he may interpret.**

A. One Must Desire to Interpret

1 Cor 12:31

But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

1 Cor 14:1

Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

1 Cor 14:12

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

We cannot take a passive stance and hope to receive the gifts of the Spirit. God is not going to grab our jaws and force us to speak in tongues, interpret, or prophecy. The zeal and desire must come from us. The pursuit of excellence in the edification of the church must be our discipline. How zealous are you? Well, how much have you prayed that you may interpret and with what zeal (and motivation)?

[Ask how many would like to be able to interpret and then lead them in prayer for it before going on to the next point.]

B. He Will Fill Us

Luke 11:13

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

C. Faith Pleases God

Hebrews 11:6

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

2. It Is Spiritual Utterance

A. Speak in a Tongue or Tongues

It follows that there can't be an interpretation of a tongue without there being a tongue spoken first. If you are in your prayer closet, pray in the spirit. If a diverse tongue comes out of you, stop when the phrase is finished and see if there is an interpretation forthcoming.

The operation in the church isn't much different. When the Spirit leads you to speak in tongues out loud with a view to interpret, then speak. Since His will is that there be an interpretation, the fact that you just spoke in a tongue should give you faith and expectation for an interpretation.

B. Speak the First Word (or Picture) the Spirit Gives You

Spiritual utterance works through inspiration – in spirit action. The words come as you act. Speak the first word (or picture) that the Holy Spirit gives you. When the first one is spoken, the second one will come. It's somewhat like sledding; the important thing is to push off. After that, it's all downhill from there.

What you are listening for is the “still small voice.”

1 Kings 19:11-13

11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake:

12 And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice .

13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

If you are expecting a loud stereo blast, chances are that you will be disappointed. This is an inward voice, not heard with your physical ears nor produced by your own mental faculties. It is a word spoken in your spirit by the Holy Spirit.

John 10:4

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

Jesus says that we will know His voice. We need to walk in faith, not question in worry. Fear is put to death by the fire of obedience. When the word comes, don't

allow the spirit of timidity to tie you up with “Is that me? Is it my imagination?” No, boldly jump out and declare the word of the Lord.

C. Speak Until the Message Is Complete

God communicates in complete thoughts. Tongues are languages. Languages have syntax, concrete sentence structures. If you bring an interpretation and it is an incomplete thought, speak in tongues again.

Have you ever taught through an interpreter or heard a teaching through an interpreter? Oftentimes, the speaker can't speak a full sentence because the interpreter may lose his place. So he will speak a little and one will interpret. Then he speaks a bit more and the interpreter interprets that. In such a fashion, the full message comes out.

Isa 28:9-12

9 Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

10 For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:

11 For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people.

12 To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.

The interpretation may come all at once or it may be “here a little and there a little.”

3. No Premeditation

Mark 13:11

But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, **take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate**: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

No premeditation is the clarion rule of spiritual utterance! We are to speak what the Spirit gives, not what we concoct. It is easier to employ this with tongues and interpretation than with prophecy because we are already engaged in non-premeditated spiritual utterance when we are speaking in tongues.

“Take (no) thought beforehand” is the translation of the one Greek word *promerimnao* [NT:4305]. It means “to care (anxiously) in advance.”² We aren't to be anxious about this. If the Lord wants us to speak to us and through us (and He does), He will give us the words through the unction of the Holy Spirit. He hasn't given us the spirit of timidity, but of love, power, and a sound mind.³

The word translated “premeditate” is *meletao* [NT:3191] in the Stevens text. A form of this word also appears in Luke 21:14 in similar context. It means “to revolve in the mind,

² From BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 BibleSoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.

³ 2 Tim 1:7

think it through.” Interpretation of tongues isn’t supposed to spring from our imagination.

Acts 4:25

Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine [*meletao*] vain things?

Our focus should be *that* we speak, not *what* we speak.

Do Activation:

1. Pray to interpret in tongues to edify the church.
2. Begin to speak in tongues.
3. Begin to feel the Holy Spirit and speak as He feels.
4. Watch for a picture or a word to come *to* (not out of) your understanding.
5. Speak it out – more words will come if you speak the first one. Keep speaking until the message is complete.