

**So We Might Understand Each Other:  
The Gift of Tongues and Interpretation**

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**1 Cor. 14**

One of the first things that married couples discover is that husbands and wives have very different understandings of what it means to talk. Early in our marriage, Marlene would say to me, “We need to talk.” Now, you need to understand that that statement was usually made at about 11:30 or 12:00 at night. My response, almost always, was, “What do you want to talk about?”

She would say, “Oh, I don’t know. I just feel like we haven’t been talking.”

To which I would respond, “Marlene, we just spent the day together and we talked all day.”

She would say, “Yeah, but we really didn’t talk.”

So we would spend the next ten minutes or so talking about whether or not we talked. I would give her a list of the topics we talked about, to which she would respond, “Yes, but we weren’t really talking.”

I knew I was plunged into another world of communication, but I didn’t understand that world until I read a little book by a Georgetown University Linguist named Deborah Tannen titled You Just Don’t Understand, subtitled “Men and Women in Conversation.” According to Deborah Tannen the typical man is involved in report talk. The purpose of talking is to communicate information. The typical woman is more involved in rapport talk, the purpose of which is to establish relational connection.

So, I was giving Marlene reports and she was looking for rapport. This style of communication is especially an American male style of communication. The American male tends to place more emphasis on their need for independence and less on their need for social involvement. So American men tend to focus upon information and tend to focus less on the relational aspects of communication. Of course, there are lots of exceptions to this rule, but according to linguists, this is a pretty accurate generalization.

As we’ve moved into a global economy, the American male style of communication has really been a problem as American businessmen have had to relate to businessmen of other cultures. Most American businessmen think it is best to “get down to brass tacks,” as soon as possible and not waste time in small talk. The general American businessman approach has been to not beat around the bush, so to speak.

But this doesn't work very well when you are doing business deals with the Greek, Japanese, or Arab businessmen, for whom small talk is the necessary part of establishing a social relationship that will be the foundation for conducting business in the future. So, not only do we have this great divide in understanding each other because of gender differences, we also have this great divide in understanding because of cultural differences.

Add to the mix of complications, we not only have different communication styles and purposes in communication, but we, of course, speak hundreds of different languages around this planet. And like many Americans, I've discovered that we don't speak the same language that they speak in England. This has caused some pretty hilarious situations to occur when American Christians speakers go over to the UK and think that they are communicating.

So, for example, in English what I am wearing here is not called "pants." They are called "trousers." Your pants are your underwear. But if you don't strictly adhere to this difference, it can result in some pretty funny communication.

Several years ago a speaker from an organization called Women's Aglow was speaking to a large group of women at a conference. She said, "I need to tell you that I just got off the plane and I haven't had a chance to change. I almost never wear pants when I'm speaking. In fact, I feel rather uncomfortable speaking to you at this conference wearing pants. But I was just picked up at the airport and delivered right here. And so I just need to confess to you that I'm very self-conscious wearing my pants." The audience thought that this woman was telling them a rather intimate and shocking personal information about her underwear habits.

I was with the founder of the Vineyard movement, John Wimber, at a conference in England when he made the same mistake. He had gotten some mud on what we would call "pants" and they would call "trousers." He looked down in the middle of the conference and said, "Oh my goodness. It appears that I've soiled my pants." People began laughing. He said, "No, no, no. I didn't soil my pants. I got dirt on my trousers."

One of the funniest websites that I've ever seen is a website called "Engrish.com." In much of the world, including the nation of Japan, learning English has become something of a status symbol. So Japanese business owners put English words on their products whether or not those English words have any real relevance to the product that is being advertised. So, this website, Engrish.com, has thousands of photos of signs and posters in Japan that make absolutely no sense what so ever. Take a look at these:

#### SLIDES

- Danger! Poisonous Gus Zone (subtitled: Oh, that Gus...)

I love this one:

SLIDE

- Lettuce in pain (subtitled: Let us pray for you)

How about this one?

SLIDE

Danger! If you fall in the pond, you will be boiled (subtitled: Honey, stand over there)

Here is a pretty interesting one.

SLIDE

Incas of Emergency

I think it is supposed to be "In case of emergency".

SLIDE

(subtitled: Can someone tell me how to contact these Incas?)

I like this one.

SLIDE

Notice No washing hair or clothes in the toilet please

How about this one? This one is pretty funny.

SLIDE

No Smorking in Bed (subtitled: They can't do this. What about smorkers rights?)

Or this one,

SLIDE

Very Suspicious Supermarket (subtitled: Keep an eye on this place.)

Here's one,

SLIDE

Warning! Because there is danger that it is involved in a dolphin. Please do not grow a hand in a fence. (subtitled: If you grow it, they will come...)

How about this food prospect?

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Pan Fried Meat Dumplings, Sautéed Happy Family (subtitled: I told you they had too many kids)

And then here's one,

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Make You White (subtitled: For an extra \$19.99 we can take away your rhythm)

I've been doing a series on spiritual gifts. This weekend as we complete the series, we are going to be talking about two spiritual gifts that relate directly to this issue of communication and intelligibility. The spiritual gifts that we're going to be looking at concern our ability to understand each other's communication. I've called today's talk "So That We Might Understand Each Other: The Gift of Tongues and Interpretation." Let's pray.

SLIDE – 1 Cor. 12.8-11

<sup>1Co 12:8</sup> To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,  
<sup>1Co 12:9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,  
<sup>1Co 12:10</sup> to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, **to another distinguishing and to still another the interpretation of tongues.** <sup>2</sup> between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, <sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1Co 12:11</sup> All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

It is important, friends, at the outset that I encourage you to not let your discomfort about this subject of tongues or former teaching that emphasized the weirdness of this gift, to harden you from the reality that the Bible calls tongues "a gift of God." Whatever silliness or weirdness some people in the church world have made of this particular gift, the apostle Paul spends significant time describing this as a gift of God.

Now, one of the things that is often missed is that Paul refers to this gift as

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...speaking in different kinds of tongues... (1 Cor. 12.10)

There are, according to the apostle Paul, gifts of different kinds of tongues. And then he gives us some further explanation of this phrase, "different kinds of tongues," in 1 Cor. 13, the famous love chapter, when he says in v. 1,

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<sup>1Co 13:1</sup> And yet I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in human or angelic tongues,<sup>1</sup> but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

So it is possible to speak in human languages, and apparently, it is possible to speak in angelic languages. We are going to talk about the phenomenon of being gifted to speak in foreign languages that you did not learn, but that are instantly given to you by the Holy Spirit. That phenomenon is called,

#### SLIDE

Xenolalia

Xeno = foreign

Lalia = tongues

I've heard unconfirmed reports from foreign language speakers who claim that they heard Americans speaking in tongues and that phrases that they were using in their tongues were phrases from their own native languages. So, for example, a person who spoke in Persian told me that they heard an American speaker say, "Praise the Lord! Glory to God in the highest" in Persian. I've heard the same kinds of unconfirmed reports regarding people saying that they heard American speakers praising God or praying to God in Japanese. This is a rare occurrence. But it appears to be part of the biblical picture of tongues speaking. We will look more at that when we get to Acts 2 in just a moment.

The apostle Paul speaks about a different kind of tongues in 1 Cor. 13. He is speaking about the tongues of angels. Talk about cross-cultural communication. It is unclear what Paul meant by the tongues of angels, which are technically called,

#### SLIDE

Angelolalia = speaking in an angelic tongue

One of the best known Pentecostal scholars, a man by the name of Russell Spittler, who taught for many years at Fuller Seminary, said that angelolalia, or the tongues of angels, was something that Jewish people in Paul's day were familiar with. There is a first century Jewish document from Egypt called The Testament of Job, which describes Job approaching his death. As he prepares to die, he distributes his possessions among his children, reserving the best of his goods, a triple-stranded sash for each of his three daughters. As the three girls try on each strand, they are instantly transformed. The first daughter speaks ecstatically in angel's tongues; the second daughter speaks in tongues of the heavenly ruling powers; and the third daughter speaks in the tongues of the cherubim. These angelic tongues are angelic languages directed towards God in prayer and praise.

Some people believe that the tongues that we read about in 1 Cor. are angelic tongues, sometimes called heavenly tongues. We simply do not have enough biblical information to be dogmatic on this point, but the apostle Paul gives us a great deal of information about one particular type of tongues, a type that is quite common in charismatic and Pentecostal churches, and in the Vineyard.

Maybe you've been raised in a church that put tongues speaking just a half step above snake-handling. Maybe you've flipped through the stations at night and seen some odd looking person on Trinity Broadcasting Network babbling into the screen. Or maybe on the other hand, you were raised in a church tradition which puts tongues speaking at the very pinnacle of spiritual experience and made it the end all and be-all of one's life with God, and you were turned off because many of the spiritually elite "tongues-speakers" lived lives that can hardly be considered "victorious."

What I would like to do is offer you a balanced biblical perspective of what the apostle Paul calls the gift of different kinds of tongues and the gift of interpretation. One of the simplest ways for you to understand the gift of tongues, as it appears in the book of 1 Cor. is to turn to 1 Cor. 14. You can do this in your own devotional life. I've urged people who have been confused about the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy to engage in this little exercise.

Take a sheet of paper and divide it in two. On the top of the page mark side "Prophecy" and the other side "Tongues." And then go through 1 Cor. 14 and list all of the things 1 Cor. 14 teaches us about prophecy and on the other side list all of the things 1 Cor. 14 teaches us about tongues. So, for example, the apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 14.1-3 these words:

#### SLIDE

Prophecy	Tongues
1. <sup>1Co 14:1</sup> Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.	1. <sup>1Co 14:2</sup> For those who speak in a tongue <sup>1</sup> do not speak to other people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.
2. <sup>1Co 14:3</sup> But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.	

So, Paul tells me to eagerly desires spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Put that in column one.

What is prophecy then? Prophecy is speaking forth a message in a known language to men and women under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit. Look what Paul says in verse 3:

“Everyone who prophesies speaks to men...” Okay, so we are saying prophecy is speaking to men and women. “...a message in a known language” and we will find that throughout 1 Cor. 14 that it is a known language “...under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit.”

You say, “Well, then what is the gift of tongues in 1 Cor. 14.2?”

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“Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.”

I think the preferred translation here of that phrase, “with his spirit,” is better put “by the Spirit.” Those of you who have the NIV see that an alternative translation for that last phrase is “by the Holy Spirit” and I really think that that gives a better sense of the Greek than “with his spirit” does.

What is tongues?

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Tongues is speaking forth a Spirit-inspired message in a language unknown to the speaker or hearer.

Notice it says in verse 2

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“No one understands him.”

This was the problem in Corinth. There were all these tongues-speakers, perhaps speaking at once, perhaps competing with one another. But in any case, in the bedlam of the speaking no one could understand each other. It was Engrish.com to the n<sup>th</sup> degree.

So prophecy is speaking a message in a known language to men and women under the inspiration of the Spirit. Tongues is speaking a message in an unknown language not to men and women, but to God. The direction of prophecy is down from God to men and women. The direction of tongues is up from men and women to God. Thus, when an interpretation of tongues is given it ought not to sound like, “‘My people, I love you,’ says the Lord.” That’s a prophecy. The direction is down from God to men and women. An interpretation of tongues should go up from people to God. Thus, it should sound

like, "We praise You, Almighty God. You are our Lover, our Friend, our Redeemer, our Master, our Savior. You are all we need and You are all we want. We love You."

Now, what are some of the objections to the current use of tongues? Certainly, the biggest objection to the current use of tongues is, as I've referred to before, the weirdness factor. People are just uncomfortable with the notion that someone, whether themselves or another person, can speak a series of unlearned, unintelligible syllables. For many, this is the end of the matter. If we are uncomfortable with something, then it must not be God.

May I share with you something with all affection? God's highest priority is not to make you or me comfortable. His highest priority is to make you and me Christ-like, and much of the way that he makes us Christ-like is by making us uncomfortable. So much of Christian growth occurs as God pushes out of our comfort zones. He nudges us saying, "I want you to go on a short-term missions trip with the church to Africa or Brazil, even though the only international traveling you've ever done in your life was to Canada and that being when you were a child."

God nudges you and says to you, "I want you to begin to serve in children's ministry" even though you are a single adult and not only have you not had children of your own, but the only child you've ever been around is your little brother and you didn't like him very much.

God may nudge you to lead worship in your small group, or to give a teaching in some setting, or to share your faith with your boss, or to give financially well beyond what you are currently giving. All of these things may make you uncomfortable, and yet, they very well may be God's leading in your life because friend, God's highest priority for you and me is not to make us comfortable. It is to make us Christ-like. Never allow your comfort level to be the determinant of what you are willing to accept from God. Because I will tell you, if your comfort level becomes the determinant, then you are severely limiting the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life.

I would go further and say to never let the weirdness of something be the ultimate determinant of whether you believe something is from God. Have you ever read this book? There is a lot of weird stuff in this book. It's true, but it is weird. I mean, if you met John the Baptist, a man wearing a hair shirt and living out in the desert eating locusts and honey, you might say to yourself, "Pretty weird." Yet Jesus said that he was the greatest prophet who ever lived up until the time of Christ.

So, what are some of the other objections to the current use of tongues? Well, some people say that to be a true biblical gift of tongues, it must be a known foreign language that is spoken, and 1 Cor. 14 is quite clear that the tongues that Paul is referring to are not known foreign languages. In verse 2, Paul says,



SLIDE

“Anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. Indeed, no one understands him.”

By “no one understands him” he means no one. Not just the immediate listeners because they speak English and he is speaking French. He means no one. Even if a Frenchman came in he wouldn’t understand him because this is not a known language.

Paul’s whole point, by the way, in vv. 6-17 regarding the need for an interpreter of tongues is that tongues are not understood by anyone in the church without interpretation. It is the lack of understandability that drives his whole argument regarding why tongues speaking should not occur in church without interpretation.

But it is possible to speak in tongues privately without the need for interpretation because in private we are not concerned about communicating with others so that they might understand us. If you want to see this private use of tongues, what might be called the private devotional use of tongues over against the public church use of tongues, you can find no clearer passage than verses 18-19 where Paul says,

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“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church, I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

He draws the distinction between his rare use of the gift of tongues in public worship services, and his frequent use of the gift of tongues in private devotions.

In other words, Paul is saying that in church his goal is not to speak unknown syllables to people because no one understands and therefore that doesn’t encourage other people. When we are in church, in public worship, our goal is not simply to have a great personal experience. The goal of being together in public and in community is to encourage other people. So Paul is saying that in church he speaks known languages. We would say today that we speak American in American churches in order to encourage other Americans.

And if we are going to speak in tongues in a church service, you must have an interpretation so that other people can understand what you are saying. In private, there is no need for an interpretation because you are not attempting to build anyone else up. When you are in private, your only concern, as we are going to find out in a moment, is to build yourself up.

What is the purpose then of Corinthian type tongues (what people call angelic tongues)? The purpose of tongues is v. 2:

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“For anyone who speaks in a tongue doesn’t speak to men, but to God.”

We see that the purpose of tongues has to do with the person speaking to God. And what is it that they are speaking to God? Verse 14 says,

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“If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, my mind is unfruitful. What shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, I will pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit. I will sing with my mind.”

The first thing that we see regarding tongues is that tongues is a way of praying. Verse 14:

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“If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays.”

And he goes on and talks about praying with his spirit. Tongues is a way to pray. It is a way to pray for your own needs. It is a way to pray for the needs of others in intercession. You can pray with your mind in English about things that are of concern to you, but sometimes you will find that praying with your mind in English is inadequate. You are not communicating from the depth of your being, from your spirit. At other times, you simply don’t know what to say or how to intercede.

I have often prayed for people and just not known how to pray or what to pray. So I have interceded for them in tongues. Sometimes I am so burdened and I feel so bad, I feel so depressed and I don’t know what the problem is or how to get myself out from under it, so I pray in tongues. Tongues helps me pray from the depths of my inner being – from my spirit. So, one purpose of tongues is prayer – deep prayer that reaches down to the depths.

And a second purpose of tongues and I think the major purpose of tongues is praise. V. 16,

SLIDE

“If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who don’t understand say ‘Amen’ to your thanksgiving since he doesn’t know what you are saying. You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.”

Tongues is a form of praise and thanksgiving. In many of the mentions of tongues in the book of Acts, it is a form of worship and a form of praise? It is a way to say, “Hallelujah, Hosanna in the highest, praise God, thank you Jesus” from the depth of your being. As Charles Wesley’s old hymn says:

## SLIDE

“Oh for a thousand tongues to sing,  
My great Redeemer’s praise.”

Very often we feel like our worship is so inadequate. We desperately want to praise God or thank God but our human language falls so far short of the joy we feel inside. That is when tongues is so helpful—to praise in the Spirit. If you look up the instances of tongues in the book of Acts, they often involve praise. On Pentecost, even when the apostles were speaking in known foreign languages, they were speaking forth the mighty deeds of God. In Acts 10 when the household of Cornelius begins to speak in tongues it says in Acts 10:46 that they were all speaking in tongues praising God. It is speech directed to God. So we are talking about prayer and praise.

Tongues has another purpose. It edifies or builds oneself up. Remember from my teaching on prophecy that prophecy’s purpose is to build up the church. To strengthen the church. To exhort the church. To comfort the church. The purpose of tongues is not for the church. The purpose of tongues is for oneself. And in verse 4 it says that:

## SLIDE

“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.”

Prophecy builds up the church and tongues builds yourself up. It builds you up in your inner man or woman, in your spirit. A theologian named James Dunn said this about the gift of tongues:

## SLIDE

Studies have indicated that contrary to popular belief in which tongues was associated with madness, today it is said to give people a sense of balance, wholeness, and well being.

He goes on to say:

## SLIDE

Depression among tongues-speakers is often reduced. They become more open to feeling and to the affective dimension of their experience, more spontaneous, and better able to cope with anxiety.

Friends, if you struggle with anxiety or depression, if you’ve ever known inside that feeling of being in a sink hole where you just feel like everything is inwardly collapsing, one of the ways you can build yourself up inwardly is through the use of the gift of tongues. I would very much encourage any of you who struggle with depression, or struggle with anxiety to ask God to give you this gift. The gift is designed to build your spirit. In other words, it is designed to build up your inner person.

The gift of tongues is also helpful when you are engaged in spiritual warfare. There are times when you are under attack and feel really tempted by lust or bitterness or anger or rebellion. Whenever you feel pressed upon by spiritual forces of wickedness and you find that you just can't deal with it. You say, "I feel so overwhelmed. I feel so weak inside. I need to be strengthened in my inner man. How can I be strengthened to stand firm and not give ground in this spiritual attack?"

Pray in tongues. It edifies you and builds you up. I think we see a hint of this spiritual warfare use of tongues in the book of Jude. Jude 20,

#### SLIDE

Jude 1:20

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,

I want to read to you these verses. I am not saying this is a direct reference to tongues. I am saying that this may be an allusion, an indirect reference to tongues. Throughout the book of Jude, Jude is talking about spiritual warfare and about battling with evil men and with those who oppose us in the faith. Then he says: "But you dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." I think clearly that one of the ways that we build ourselves up in our most holy faith is that we pray in the Holy Spirit. And part of praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues. There is a warfare dimension to tongues.

A final reason I think tongues is given, is it serves as objective evidence of the Spirit's coming. If you are taking notes, you can look at Acts 10:44-46 where tongues is a sign, an objective evidence of the Spirit's coming.

You know, I have seen this in the lives of many people. They are prayed for and the Holy Spirit comes and fills that person's life. The person begins to speak in tongues and the fact that they now have the gift of tongues and can speak in tongues says to that person that, yes, I did have a real experience with the Holy Spirit back in March, back three years ago, back ten years ago. It is objective evidence. It is a proof that the Spirit came.

What is not the purpose of tongues? Well, I don't think tongues are the only evidence of the Spirit's filling, but it is prominent evidence of the Spirit's filling in the book of Acts. The Spirit comes and does whatever the Spirit wants to do. The Spirit can come and give you gifts of healing. The Spirit can come and give your prophecy. The Spirit can come to encourage you. The Spirit can come to speak to you about God's love for you. Tongues is one prominent way that you know that the Spirit has come to fill you, but it is not the only way.

And it is certainly not the sign of spiritual maturity as some would want to make it out to be. It speech to God. It is for prayer and praise. It is designed to build you up

emotionally and to build you up when you are battling in warfare and it does provide evidence of the Spirit's coming, but I don't believe that it is the only evidence. Nor do I believe that it is the sign of instant maturity, that you have somehow arrived.

Now how prominent a place should 1 Cor. 14 type tongues play in a Christian believer's life? It certainly doesn't elevate an individual to spiritually elite status the way some Pentecostal and charismatic churches teach. In many churches, the subtext of teaching on tongues would be something like this: "I'm not saying that you aren't a Christian, if you don't speak in tongues, but if you really want to live the glorious Christian life, the victorious Christian life, you've got to speak in tongues." In other words, you can travel to Europe down in the baggage, next to the engine room, or you can travel first class and have a huge ocean viewing balcony.

Paul never makes this kind of claim. He never divides the church into first class and second class Christians. He never says that speaking in tongues puts you among the spiritually elite. In fact, he consistently lists tongues last in the order of the gifts. He does that in 1 Cor. 12.8-10. He does the same thing in 1 Cor. 12.28-30,

SLIDE

1Co 12:28 And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

1Co 12:29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?

1Co 12:30 Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues?<sup>4</sup> Do all interpret?

But having said that you are not suddenly exalted to spiritually elite status by speaking in tongues, nevertheless, the apostle Paul says that the gift of tongues is very valuable. Indeed, he said that it had huge personal value for him and he desired it for every other Christian. 1 Cor. 14.5

SLIDE

1Co 14:5 I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, ...

1Co 14:18 I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

Tongues is a valuable gift. Do not absorb yourself in the theoretical discussion: Can everyone speak in tongues? The answer is clearly not. God has not given this gift to everyone. But my read of 1 Cor. 14 suggests that everyone ought to seek the gift of tongues. Everyone won't speak in tongues, but everyone ought to seek to speak in tongues. You ought to ask God, and you ought to ask God repeatedly to give you this gift to assist you to pray better, to assist you to praise better, to assist you in building yourself up, to assist you in dealing with emotional problems and with spiritual warfare, and to give your own spirit evidence that you have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

As I said before, there are different kinds of tongues. The other kind of tongues that we encounter in the Bible is what I referred to before as xenolalia, the Spirit-inspired gift of being able to speak in an unlearned foreign language.

SLIDE - Acts 2:5-13:

"Now there were staying in Jerusalem, God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: 'Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine.'"

The miracle that occurred is that pilgrims from all these different places heard God speak to them in their own language. We see in the miracle of Pentecost the reversal of the curse that took place in the tower of Babel. Back in Gen. 11 God cursed human beings because of our pride, because of our irreverence toward Him. At Babel, God caused us not to be able to understand each other. Communication broke down. It was English.com to the n<sup>th</sup> degree. At Pentecost all that changed. God's Spirit created understanding and connection. God's Spirit broke down ethnic walls and cultural walls, and economic and educational walls.

So, the tongues that were spoken on the Day of Pentecost are clearly different than the gift of tongues that we just looked at in 1 Cor. 12 and 14.

How is it different? Well, it is different first of all in direction. The apostles in Acts 2 were clearly speaking to men and women about God. In 1 Cor. the direction is not directed from God to man, the direction is from man to God. The apostle Paul said that the person who speaks in a tongue in 1 Cor. 14:2 does not speak to men, but to God. The gift of tongues today is a gift in which we are talking to God and not to other people.

The main difference is that the gift of tongues in Acts 2 was clearly a gift that was intelligible, that was understood by the hearers. These were known languages and the hearers understood it.

SLIDE - V. 8

"How is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?"

SLIDE - V. 11

"We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues."

Something prophetic was happening here. This was the birth of world missions –the good news about Jesus was going to go beyond Israel and its natural borders. It was going to extend to everyone around the world.

With that as a long parenthesis, what was the miracle? The miracle was that people heard God speaking their own language.

SLIDE - V. 8

“How is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?”

SLIDE - V. 11

“We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues.”

One of the greatest miracles that occurs in an individual’s life is the radical discovery that God speaks our own language. When people hear God speaking in their own language for the first time, when God connects with them – not just with the world, but with them – the results in their lives is just seismic. This is earth-shattering because most people who even believe in God believe in a God that is just sort of all around us - the God for someone else or for the whole world. There is a difference between believing that there is a God that sent his Son to die for the sins of the world and experiencing the reality that MY God, not just a God, but MY God sent his Son to die for MY sins. Very often that little change of pronouns from everyone’s sin to MY sin and from everyone’s God to MY God takes place when people hear God speaking in their own language.

That’s what happened to me. I first heard about Jesus through a woman, who is now my wife, Marlene. Many of you have heard me share this story before. I come from a conservative Jewish background. But through Marlene’s life and through her communication to me I began to understand the basic outlines of what God did in Jesus Christ. I began to understand something of the story of God coming and taking on flesh, walking around in Palestine as a man for 33 years. That this God was hung on a cross and died for sin and rose again.

But there was still this distance between that story and me until I heard God speaking in my own language. It was at a Passover dinner where I heard a Jewish believer in Jesus explain the meaning of Jesus in terms that I, as a Jewish teenager, could understand.

Our whole understanding of the incarnation of God coming to us in the flesh revolves around this incredible idea that God in heaven speaks our language – not some heavenly language, not some angelic language. Not English.com. He reaches out and connects with us. It is this idea that God works miracles by people hearing their own language that has fueled the Bible translation movement of this century. In the last few centuries, great missionaries like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, Henry Martyn,

Adoniram Judson, and especially, Cameron Townsend and the Wycliffe Bible Translators organization, that has put wheels on this. People need to have the scriptures in their own language.

Now we are not just talking about Bible translation when we think of the God who speaks our language. We are talking about the experience of people when they walk into a church and finally feel like “I’m home. This is what I have been looking for my whole life. This church connects with me.” One of the greatest compliments that I hear regarding the Vineyard is when people come up and say, “When I came I finally felt like I was home.” What they mean is that they finally found a place where God speaks to them in their own language and they don’t have to jump through 72 foreign religious hoops. For some it’s the informality. For some it’s the music. For some it’s the message or the sense of authenticity.

As a congregation we need to commit ourselves to the on-going task of speaking to people in their own languages, because what we have going here in the Vineyard at this moment in time is not the language of many of the ethnics that live in our city. That is why we need to learn to speak the language of Hispanics, of African Americans, of Asians, and African students coming to Ohio State.

And not just ethnically, but in terms of age. The language of baby boomers from the 1980s is not the language of young adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Whether we are talking about our musical style or our graphics, people need to hear the message in their own language. People need to hear that this message about Jesus Christ is not just for happily married people as they assume. They suddenly hear, “My goodness, you mean this applies to me as a single person?” As a divorced person? It is not just for the perfect American family, but it is for blended families. It is not just for men, but for women. It is not just for the old, but for the young. Not just the suburbs but for the inner-city.

Let me ask you a question - if you are a member of this church you can write this down. Do you love people enough to try to speak to them about God in their own language? Not everyone is a church person. Not everyone speaks Christianese. Do you love people enough to learn their language? The way they think? The categories they place things in? Do you love teenagers enough to speak to the needs of teens? Do you have a big enough heart that it also includes teens? Do you love kids enough to speak the language of a 5-year old? How about the language of the deaf? Do we as a church love people in this community enough to say, “You don’t have to just learn our language to come to God, we are committed to speak your language.” The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us that kind of love and passion.

You know, it is an act of love and a mark of the Holy Spirit’s presence to seek to communicate in ways that can be understood by others. That’s why we pray for the gift of interpretation of tongues in a church before we share a tongue. That’s why in a



healthy marriage a husband and wife try to understand what the other person means by talking. So when Marlene says, “We haven’t talked, “ I have learned what she means. We haven’t connected. We haven’t related to one another.

It is an act of love to try to walk in the shoes of another person so that they can understand God’s love in their own language. When you truly love someone, you seek to communicate in a way that can be embraced by them.

As you pray for the gift of tongues, pray for the gift that will edify yourself, but also pray for the miracle of being able to communicate the love of Jesus Christ in a way that can be embraced by those near you in your own family and to the wider community by this church. Let’s pray.

## The Gift of Different Kinds of Tongues

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Rich Nathan

July 1-2, 2006

Spiritual Gifts: Showing the Spirit Series

1 Cor. 14; Acts 2

### I. The Challenge Of Communication

### II. The Tongues Of Corinth

- A. What Kinds Of Tongues Exist? (1 Cor. 13.1)
- B. What Is Tongues? (1 Cor. 14.2)
- C. What Are The Objections To Tongues?
  - 1. Tongues Makes Me Uncomfortable
  - 2. Tongues Must Be Interpreted
- D. What Are The Purposes Of Corinthian-Type Tongues?
  - 1. Prayer (1 Cor. 14.14, 15)
  - 2. Praise (1 Cor. 14.16, 17)
  - 3. Building Oneself Up (1 Cor. 14.4)
  - 4. Spiritual Warfare (Jude 20)
  - 5. Evidence Of The Holy Spirit's Filling (Acts 10.44-46)
- E. How Should Tongues Be Regarded? (1 Cor. 12.28-30)

### III. The Tongues Of Pentecost (Acts 2)

- A. The Miracle Of Hearing God In One's Own Language
- B. Caring Enough To Learn Another's Language