

The Controversial Gifts

By Dr Christopher Pepler

I grew up in a conservative Methodist home and during my childhood years would sometimes hear disparaging comments about 'holly rollers' who, I was told, were Pentecostals who rolled wildly on the floor talking in tongues. At the age of thirty I 'got saved' and my wife and I started attending an Assemblies of God church. I didn't see anyone rolling on the floor but I did hear tongues, both spoken and sung. The singing was beautiful and inspiring and I had no idea at that stage that speaking in tongues was a contentious issue for so many Christians.

Some six months later we joined a small charismatic Methodist church near our home. By interacting with the leaders I started to understand that many folk in the traditional non-Pentecostal denominations felt that tongues-talkers saw themselves as superior Christians. Some of those I spoke to even told me that they had been told that they weren't even saved because they didn't speak in tongues.

I started reading into the issue many years later and discovered that there are several groupings of views concerning tongues. Among Pentecostals and some charismatics there are those who believe that all Christians need to experience 'the baptism in the Holy Spirit' and that this is evidenced by speaking in tongues. A minority of Pentecostals hold the view that unless you are baptised in the Spirit, and thus speak in tongues, then you are not saved; but this is a very small group. Most believe that the baptism in the Spirit is an empowering experience necessary for Christian life and ministry. Among these folk there are those who teach a one-off experience, while others contend that the initial experience needs to be followed by constant 'infillings'.

Among non-Pentecostals there are three main groupings. A small number of mainly Calvinistic and dispensational believers believe that tongues were limited to the initial day of Pentecost experience that signified a reversal of the Babel dispersion in the establishing of the church, and possibly the period before the canon of scripture was established. A much larger group hold that tongues are biblically valid yet not applicable to them personally as God has not chosen to give them that 'gift'. Charismatic and third-wave Christians, on the other hand, see tongues as both biblically valid and normative for believers.

This article is about tongues and interpretation of tongues and I have written it from the perspective of a member of the third of the above grouping in that I see tongues as biblically valid and therefore currently normative. Two fundamental presuppositions underpin my thinking. The first is my belief that the Bible is divinely inspired and authoritative. The

second is that Christian doctrine and practice must be determined by a responsible and honest interpretation of the scriptures.

I have developed the themes of this article under three sections. In the first of these I simply state what my contentions are regarding the importance of tongues and interpretation. In the second section I support my contentions from a study of key scriptures relevant to the topic. I have used line numbers so that I can reference my views in section one to the scriptures detailed in section two. In section three I deal with some practical aspects.

Explanation of tongues

Before saying why I believe tongues are important I should first define what they are. The shortest definition would be that tongues are spiritual utterances by man to God (245,335). Wayne Grudem defines tongues as 'prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker' but any comprehensive definition should include the fact that the Holy Spirit works in, through, and with a believer to transcendently communicate with the Godhead. I don't think that tongues are known human languages and nor do I think they are simply ecstatic gibberish. They are intelligible to God; they convey meaning.

I see no difference between the tongues of the book of Acts and the tongues in the church of Corinth. The book of Acts records several instances of talking in tongues with no stated or even implied difference between the phenomena. Paul writes to the church of Corinth and deals extensively with the matter of tongues and interpretation of tongues. He makes no comparison with the instances of tongues recorded in Acts. I find no biblical evidence that the tongues of Acts, Corinth, and today are any different.

I also see no difference between private tongues and public tongues other than in context. When tongues are spoken privately they are personal expressions of devotion to God (275,295,335). However, whatever is done within a gathered church situation is to be for the edification of the whole church, and for this reason public tongues must be interpreted (270,280,295). In both cases tongues are the supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit, operating in and through the human spirit, to produce inspired praise, thanksgiving and intercession. Tongues are a sublime form of communication from a believer to God. When interpreted in a church meeting tongues enable the group to concur and participate in the transcendent communication with God. J. Rodman Williams puts it well when he describes tongues as 'the language of the Holy Spirit'(460).

The importance of tongues and interpretation of tongues.

This understanding of tongues and interpretation leads to other conclusions. Firstly, because it is Holy Spirit aided communication from a believer to the Godhead, then surely it should be desired and practiced by all (155,170,245,270,290). Who would not want to praise God and intercede for others in this way? Equally, tongues must hold good for all generations because communion with God, both privately and corporately, is a key aspect of the Christian Faith. Instead of asking 'why should I speak in tongues?' we should be asking 'why should I not speak in tongues?' No Christian would seriously claim that prayer is unnecessary, so why then do many claim that Holy Spirit inspired prayer is neither needed nor warranted? It is calamitous that something given to believers to enable us to communicate with God should be a controversial and divisive issue. Communion with God should unify, not divide!

Speaking in tongues is important from a personal perspective, not because it is the evidence of some other spiritual experience, but because in itself it is edifying (260). Edification does not signify only something that informs or instructs, and nor is its scope restricted to the conscious mind. The word includes the idea of enlightenment and that which is spiritually uplifting. Some theologians see little difference between spirit and mind, but I believe that there is a huge difference between the two and that spiritual realities are not always perceived by the mind. Tongues enable believers to express things that their mother languages and limited mental capacities cannot. Prayer in tongues transcends usual speech.

Interpreted tongues are important within the context of gathered church life because they serve two main purposes. Firstly, they enable the congregation to express its corporate mind in words and in a way that transcends their usual patterns of communication. Secondly, tongues, because of its transcendent nature and divine origin, lifts the congregation into a level of spirituality where faith is engendered and other manifestations of the Holy Spirit can more easily occur.

A key distinctive of tongues is that it is a unique sign of the church age. Paul lists nine manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Seven of these can be traced back to the Old Testament people of God, but tongues and interpretation of tongues are a uniquely church phenomenon. Perhaps this is the reason Paul places them last in his illustrative list of spiritual manifestations. The Gospel of Mark ends with Jesus saying that *"these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."* (Mark 16:17-18) Once again, driving out demons, divine protection, and healings are not unique to the Church age, but tongues are.

Interpretation of key texts

Three books contain information on tongues and interpretation. Acts chapters 2, 10, and 19 plus 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14 contain key information, and Romans 8:26-27 has a possible bearing on the subject.

Acts 2:1-16

This passage describes how the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church on the day of Pentecost and filled all the disciples with power from on high. *'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.'* (Acts 2:4)

The very first utterance of the Jerusalem believers after the Holy Spirit had come upon them was to speak in tongues. The nature of what was happening is clarified further on in the account. The visitors to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost were from many different nations and languages. *'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?'* (Acts 2:6-9). It is commonly assumed that the 120 disciples were speaking in different known languages but this doesn't hold up on three counts. Firstly, the text states that the visitors *heard* the disciples speaking their home languages, not that they were actually speaking those languages. This is an important distinction because it means that both tongues and interpretation of tongues were occurring. The disciples spoke in tongues that were unintelligible but the visitors understood what they were saying and so the Holy Spirit must have been enabling them to do so (interpretation of tongues). This understanding of what was happening is supported by the comment in Acts 2:13 that *'some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."* Peter then countered this by declaring that *"these men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!"* (Acts 2:15-16) Now, why would anyone think that the disciples were drunk if they were speaking in known languages? Human languages all have a structure and rhythm to them; even if we don't understand a foreign language we know that it is a language. It is far more likely that the mockers said what they did because what they heard did not sound like any language they had ever encountered.

Then there is the matter of logistics. Three thousand people got saved in response to Peter's sermon, so there must have been in excess of that number who heard the disciples speaking in tongues. The text states that there were people there from *'every nation under heaven'* (Acts 2:5). I have no idea how many nations there were in the world at that time but the

current number is about 195, so let's rather go with the smaller number of disciples who were doing the talking, 120. How was it possible that a mixed crowd of people from so many different nations could all hear the disciples speaking in their particular mother tongue? For this to be possible at a purely human level, each disciple would have to be speaking a different language and the crowd would have to split up into its different language groups with a homogeneous crowd of some 40 or 50 gathered close enough to each disciple for them to hear what was being said. This is logistically impossible without a high level of organisation and discipline which is something the biblical account does not even hint at. My conclusion is that the disciples were speaking in a heavenly language unknown to anyone on earth (tongues), and that the visitors to Jerusalem were supernaturally enabled to understand the basic content of what they were saying (interpretation of tongues).

Acts 2 also gives us vital information on the content of what the disciples were saying in tongues. The visitors declared, "*we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!*" (Acts 2:11) The disciples were not presenting the Gospel, nor explaining Old Testament prophecy; Peter did exactly that a moment later when he stood up to preach. The tongues were expressions of praise. This also comes through in Paul's teaching which I will examine in due course.

One common understanding is that tongues are always actual known human languages. This contention derives exclusively from the Acts 2 account. An extension of this idea is the belief that tongues only have application within missionary situations where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed in a foreign language. This reasoning fails not only because of what I have already explained but also because Paul defined tongues as speech uttered by men to God, not to other men; but more about that later.

Acts 10:44-46

This passage describes the 'Pentecostal' type experience of the Caesarean believers. Once again the content of the tongues is indicated. '*While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.*' (Acts 10:44-46) As in Acts 2 the tongues speakers were praising God and the statement is once again that others heard and understood what they were speaking. There doesn't seem to be any reason why the new believers should be speaking in foreign human languages as only Peter and his converted Jewish companions were there.

Acts 19:6

Here Paul visits Ephesus and ministers to a group of about twelve believers. *'When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.'* This account gives no new information except that the response of the recipients of the Holy Spirit was both to speak in tongues and prophecy. This is not evidence that tongues are a form of prophecy for this would contradict what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 14. However, it does provide evidence that tongues is not the *only* evidence of being filled with the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12

The themes of this chapter are diversity and order. It appears that chapters 12 to 14 are addressing an abuse of tongues by the Corinthian church. They seem to have regarded tongues as a sign of super-spirituality and were not particularly concerned about edifying others.

In verse 7 Paul states two key concepts; *'Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.'* Firstly, each person in the church community is able to partner with the Holy Spirit in the manifestation of His gifts to the Body of Christ. Secondly, the purpose of these gifts is to benefit the church, not just individuals.

In verses 8 to 11 Paul lists nine of these spiritual manifestations which he states in verse 11 are given by the Holy Spirit to each one, just as He determines. The common belief among charismatics is that these gifts are given to each believer when they are baptised by the Holy Spirit. The result of this thinking is that each believer is said to possess at least one gift which he/she uses under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Paul's analogy of the different parts of the body seems to support this understanding, particularly as he ends the argument with the words, *'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?'* (1 Cor 12:27-31) However verse 31 presents a sharp contradiction.

Vs 30 *'Do all speak in tongues'* is often cited by those who believe that tongues is not for everybody. The important thing to note however is that the whole passage is addressing behaviour in a congregational meeting. In a church meeting not all should speak in tongues and Paul actually limits the corporate expression of tongues to 2 or 3 in any given meeting. There is no indication in this passage, or any other text, that Paul is teaching that everyone should not pray in tongues in private devotions (see also 1 Cor 14:18).

Verse 31 reads, *'But eagerly desire the greater gifts'*. How can we be exhorted to desire certain gifts when the Holy Spirit has already bestowed on us whatever gifts He deems most suitable? The opening verse of chapter 14 presents the same problem when it says, *'Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.'* So, my understanding is that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts to the church as and when He deems it necessary through whoever is open to work with Him to deliver the gift when it is required. The church receives the gift and it is not a permanent endowment on an individual. Also, the gift is manifest as and when it is required to edify the church.

Following along this line of thinking, I understand that in verses 7 to 11 Paul is mentioning nine ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests His blessing to the church in and through individuals. However, in verses 27 to 31 he has ministries in view. Ministries are areas of service in which believers operate regularly. The connection between manifestations and ministries is that the Holy Spirit will manifest in certain ways in order to establish the various ministries within the church. For instance, a person who has a prophetic ministry would not be able to function in that capacity if the Holy Spirit did not regularly manifest words of prophecy through him. Tongues are also mentioned as an area of ministry. This means that some people serve to regularly speak prayers in tongues within the meetings of the church. This is why, in 1 Cor 14:28 Paul instructs those with a tongues ministry not to speak in the assembled congregation unless there is someone present who has the ministry of interpreting tongues.

My summation of chapter 12 is that Paul is teaching (a) that the Holy Spirit can and will work with all and any believer to manifest His gifts to the church, (b) each person in the church also has a specific functionality in a particular area of ministry, and (c) in this way the Holy Spirit works in and through all members of the church and so they are all important to the functionality of the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 14

This chapter builds on the foundations laid in chapter 12 and presents the thrust of Paul's argument that tongues are to be practiced in public for the benefit of the church and within an environment of order.

Verses 2 and 3 define the essential nature of both tongues and prophecy and compare the two to each other. *'For 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. But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.'* Tongues are from man to God whereas prophecy is from God to man. Tongues are a sublime form of praise, thanksgiving, and intercession. Prophecy is God's communication to the church.

A problem in understanding and practice within most Pentecostal and Charismatic churches emerges at this point. In most cases, interpretations of tongues are presented as words of prophecy. Someone speaks in tongues in a church service and someone else interprets what has been said as “The Lord would have you know”, or words to that effect. This practice seems to be based on very flimsy exegetical evidence and flies in the face of the clear statement of verse 2. The reasoning normally flows from an interpretation of the word ‘mysteries’. The idea usually presented is that the mysteries referred to are the hidden things that God wants to communicate to His church and so to speak ‘mysteries’ is to speak to the church. However, the second part of verse 2 qualifies, not contradicts the first part of the verse. So, a simpler and more consistent interpretation is that in praying in tongues is mysterious to the rest of the body of believers unless it is interpreted in their mother language.

Verse 4 is often taken as referring to private tongues but this would be out of context with the passage which is addressing the manifestation of tongues in the congregation. It simply says, *‘He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church’*. Speaking in tongues does indeed edify the one speaking in that it transports him or her into a higher spiritual realm, yet the point Paul is making is that in the gathered church the objective is to edify everyone else, not just oneself. An interpreted tongue, on the other hand, does edify the church.

In verse 5 Paul makes this point clear but at the same time he introduces the concept of the private use of tongues. *‘I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified’*. When he writes that he would like everyone to speak in tongues he is not referring to what they do in a congregational meeting because later on in chapter 14 he restricts this to 2 or 3 people (vs.27) Therefore, he must have the private devotional use of tongues in mind. Verses 18-19 bear this out where he writes, *‘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.’* His point is clear that in private the believers are to freely pray in tongues but in the congregational meetings the objective is to edify others within an environment of order.

Paul continues to flesh out this argument in verses 6 to 11. In verse 12 Paul brings it to a fine point when he writes, *‘Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church’*. The objective is to edify the church. Once again Paul uses a phrase that indicates that spiritual manifestations are not permanently bestowed on particular believers. If this were so then just how would he expect them to try to excel in only certain gifts?

Several words in verses 13 to 17 support the contention that tongues are a sublime form of prayer and not a type of prophecy. *‘If I pray in a tongue... I will pray with my spirit... If you are praising God with your spirit... say “Amen” to your thanksgiving... you may be giving*

thanks well enough...’ Surely it is clear that Paul understands tongues to be a form of communication by man to God and not the other way around?

In verses 18 and 19 Paul again makes the central point of his argument clearly and forcefully; *‘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.’*

Verses 20 to 25 appear confusing and contradictory at first. The thing to remember is that Paul is correcting believers who thought that speaking in tongues was a badge of super-spirituality and as a result everyone attempted to speak in tongues during their church services. Paul has carefully instructed them on what their attitude should be to other believers and he now turns to the subject of the effect of their misbehaviour on unbelievers.

First Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:11-12 where God is admonishing His people for failing to listen to Him. The import of what He says is that if His people will not listen when He speaks clearly to them, then He will bring judgement upon them in the form of a foreign nation who’s language will be unintelligible to them. There are two ways we can apply Paul’s use of this quote to the Corinthian church.

The first way of understanding this is as a sarcastic rebuke; “So you think that speaking in tongues is a sign of God’s approval do you, well let me tell you, if unbelievers came into your church service and started speaking in tongues then that would be a sign alright, not of approval but of God’s judgment of you!”

The second, and more usual way of understanding this passage is that if unbelievers heard everyone in church speaking in tongues, and could obviously not understand a word, then that would be a sign of judgement on them. By thinking the believers were mad they would be rejecting the church and therefore the Lord of the church. In this sense then tongues *‘are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers.’* The Message translation of the Bible expresses the passage as follows: *‘So where does it get you, all this speaking in tongues no one understands? It doesn’t help believers, and it only gives unbelievers something to gawk at. Plain truth-speaking, on the other hand, goes straight to the heart of believers and doesn’t get in the way of unbelievers. If you come together as a congregation and some unbelieving outsiders walk in on you as you’re all praying in tongues, unintelligible to each other and to them, won’t they assume you’ve taken leave of your senses and get out of there as fast as they can? But if some unbelieving outsiders walk in on a service where people are speaking out God’s truth, the plain words will bring them up against the truth and probe their hearts. Before you know it, they’re going to be on their faces before God, recognizing that God is among you.’*

Verses 26 to 33 lay out the rule of conduct in a church meeting with regard to the manifestation of spiritual gifts. In verses 39 and 40 Paul summarises his whole teaching on

this matter with the words, *'Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.'*

Romans 8:26-27

This text does not have a direct bearing on the subject of tongues because Paul does not use the word tongues, nor directly imply that he has tongues in mind. The text reads; *'the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.'* Whilst this does not define tongues in any way it does teach us something about the work of the Holy Spirit in sponsoring prayer in and through us. Of course the text makes sense in relation to tongues once one has accepted that tongues are a form of communication with God, and not a form of prophecy from God to man.

Some practical considerations

The four practically oriented questions concerning tongues and interpretation most often asked by believers are; Are tongues and interpretation of tongues still valid in the church of our day? Is there a difference between private tongues and the gift of public tongues? How do I speak in tongues? How do I interpret tongues?

Are tongues and interpretation still valid in the church of our day?

The contention that tongues passed away with the early church is based, not on careful biblical exegesis but on religious philosophy. All attempts to derive a doctrine of cessationism from scripture fail miserably. 1 Cor 13: 8 states that *'where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away'*. Of course tongues will eventually cease to operate because ultimately there will be a new heaven/earth where there will be no need for any of the spiritual provisions of this present age. Some (John MacArthur and co.) make the claim that the actual Greek words used in this verse indicate that tongues will cease before knowledge. They make this assertion based on the fact that the verb used in connection with tongues (*pausontai*, middle voice) is different and has a different voice to the verb used with knowledge (*kataugeethesontai*, passive voice). Gordon Fee comments on this as follows; *'But that misses Paul's concern rather widely. The change of verbs is purely rhetorical; to make it otherwise is to elevate to significance*

something in which Paul shows no interest at all.’ (455) Bluntly put, cessationists attempt to create a doctrine from two words taken out of their intended context.

Even weaker is the contention that 1 Cor 13:10 *‘but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears’* refers to the closing of the biblical canon. The determination of the scope and extent of New Testament scripture cannot, even by the greatest stretch of imagination, be the ‘perfection’ that Paul writes of. In verse 12 he makes it abundantly clear that he has heaven/earth in mind when he writes that *‘then we shall see face to face’*.

The cessationist argument actually rests on the contention that spiritual manifestations like tongues have fulfilled their purpose in history and are therefore redundant. I don’t agree with this, even from a historic perspective, and I certainly cannot find biblical support for such an idea. So the answer to the question, ‘are tongues and interpretation still valid in the church of our day?’ is ‘Yes they are’.

Is there a difference between private tongues and the gift of public tongues?

The idea that there is a difference between private and public tongues comes firstly from the understanding that tongues are the sign that someone has been baptised in the Holy Spirit, and that everyone should be thus baptised. Paul’s teaching concerning the limitation of tongues in public gatherings is then seen as applying to a different kind of tongue speaking. The tongues we should all have are thus called ‘devotional tongues’ and the public manifestation is called the ‘gift of tongues’. This line of thinking is strengthened by the belief that the gift of tongues is given as a permanent endowment to only some believers.

The second main perceived differentiation between the two kinds of tongues is the belief that the tongues of Pentecost were actual human languages and therefore have a purely evangelistic application. The tongues of Corinth are regarded as the unregulated use of devotional language when in fact only a limited display of supernatural utterances in foreign human languages was permissible.

A third point of differentiation is that the public gift of tongues is believed to be a supernatural utterance by the Holy Spirit through a gifted tongue talker, whereas devotional tongues are believed to be generated by the human spirit of believers.

The problem with all of these differentiations is that they just don’t have real biblical support. Tongues occurred on three of the five occasions recorded in Acts where believers received the Holy Spirit. This means only that they should be regarded as normative as an expected result of being Spirit-filled. One cannot however claim that it is the *only* sign, because prophecy is also mentioned in some of the passages concerned.

My understanding of the teaching in 1 Corinthians is that the Holy Spirit decides when and through whom the public utterance of tongues should take place. However, there is no

evidence from the texts concerned that the 'gift' is permanent or even applies to the tongues speaker. The evidence points to a distribution of the gifts as and when the need arises, and through whom the Spirit chooses at that time. It is also more reasonable to understand that the church receives the 'gift' and that the tongues speaker is the messenger through whom the gift is given.

I can find no biblical evidence that the tongues of Acts are different to the tongues of Corinth or that devotional tongues are in essence different to public tongues. Tongues spoken devotionally in private need no interpretation while public tongues do, in order to edify the church. In both cases the purpose of the tongues is to praise, thank, and intercede.

How do I speak in tongues?

1 Cor 14:14, *'For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful'*. So, the mind does not form a sentence and a word, rather the spirit provides the instructions, via the subconscious mind, to the vocal organs. The Holy Spirit does not override human will but instead works with the human spirit to articulate words of prayer. The conscious mind is not involved other than to decide to work in harmony with the Holy Spirit in this transcendent act of worship. The vocal chords, lips, tongue and breath need to be engaged just as they are in producing ordinary human speech.

At a practical level, all this means that the believer needs to submit willingly to this joint exercise and must decide to actually start speaking. This might result in a flood of strange language or it might result initially in only a few halting sounds. However, as the believer continues to speak, then and on subsequent occasions, the sounds will mature into heavenly words that come together in fluid phrases.

It stands to reason that someone who speaks in tongues in public will be someone who speaks in tongues in private. The process of speaking in tongues in public is no different to speaking in tongues in private. In private, tongues are initiated by the person in response to a need to communicate with God in a way that transcends normal language. In public, the Holy Spirit prompts the person who then still needs to initiate the process. Paul teaches on the need for an assurance of interpretation before a person speaks in tongues in public. He also says that if no interpretation is forthcoming the tongue speaker *'should pray that he may interpret what he says'* (1 Cor 14:13).

How do I interpret tongues?

The scriptures give no insight into how interpretation takes place. Some believe that the act of interpretation is in words that the Holy Spirit directly supplies. I don't think that the Corinthian passages necessarily indicate that this is the case. The manifestation of

interpretation of tongues could also be a general idea of what the tongues mean. The interpreter hears the tongues being spoken and intuitively has an appreciation of their meaning. This would explain why the interpretation of tongues seldom matches the actual utterance in length or inflection.

Once again, obedient yielding is needed. The person selected by the Holy Spirit to interpret the tongues spoken in public needs to obey the prompting and start speaking out the interpretation from the impressions received.

Conclusion

It is truly hard to comprehend how the unique gifts of tongues and interpretation of tongues, bestowed by God upon His church, should cause confusion and division. The gifts are divinely designed to lift both individual believers and whole congregations into a higher realm of praise, worship, and intercession than is humanly possible. Why would anyone want to spurn such a gift or ignore it by relegating it to ancient history? I can only surmise that the devil has waged a successful war against the church in this regard and has effectively robbed her of this wonderful endowment.

I believe that genuine Holy Spirit revival is at the door! Tongues and interpretation of tongues will most likely play a vital role in the awakening of the church to its true vigour and glory. Why should this be? It should be because these gifts are unique to the church and should therefore feature in revived church life. It should be because these gifts lift the church into a 'place' where the miraculous and the sublime can more easily occur. It should be because these gifts require obedience and yielding to the Holy Spirit, and these are two vital ingredients of genuine revival.

Some books that I have found helpful

Fee GD 1987. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

Grudem W 1994. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

Grudem W (Ed.) 1996 *Are miraculous gifts for today?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan

Williams J.Rodman 1992. *Renewal Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan