



## ***A Focus on The Gift of Tongues*** ***A Gospel Light Christian Church Positional Paper***

### **Introduction:**

While the subject of Tongues is not a fundamental doctrine like salvation by grace alone, it is nonetheless a subject of great interest because of the great diversity of views on it. As such, there is much confusion in the church today about the gift of Tongues. We hope this paper will bring scriptural clarity to this subject.

### **Definition:**

The gift of Tongues is a supernatural ability given by the Holy Spirit to speak in a previously unlearned but known human language as a warning sign to unbelievers.

### **Is the gift of Tongues about known human languages?**

Yes. The gift of Tongues is the ability to speak in a known human language previously unlearned by the speaker. We see that in Acts 2:6 and in Acts 2:8-10 where the listeners from various nationalities heard the believers speak in "his own language" and various known human languages. First Corinthians 14:21-22 also cites Isaiah 28:11, which originally referred to the Assyrian language. First Corinthians 14:10 says, "There are doubtless many different languages *in the world*, and none is without meaning." Paul assumes that the tongues being spoken of are known earthly languages.

First Corinthians 13:1 makes reference to "tongues of angels and of men". Paul is not saying that the gift of tongues includes angelic languages. He is using hyperbole to say, "Even if I had the ability." In verse 2 he similarly uses hyperbole when he says, "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge." Clearly he did not have understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge. In the same way that understanding all mysteries and having all knowledge is impossible, Paul is implying that having the ability to speak in angelic languages and all known languages is not possible either, and that even if it were possible, it would be worthless if not done out of love.

### **Has the gift of Tongues ceased?**

First Corinthians 13:8 writes: "as for tongues, they will cease". Tongues will cease, but the question is "when?". First Corinthians 13:10 states: "when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away." But what does the Bible mean by "the perfect"? "The perfect" here may refer to the completion of the canon of Scripture in the past, or it may refer to the second coming of Christ in the future. As such, there is no explicit scriptural verse or passage to conclude that Tongues have already ceased today.

### **What is the intended purpose of the gift of Tongues?**

First Corinthians 14:21,22 (a quotation from Isaiah 28:11) teaches that Tongues are a sign for the unbelieving Jews to heed God's Word. During the days of Isaiah, God warned the

Jews that a foreign people (Assyrians) will invade Northern Israel and speak a foreign language to them if they remain unbelieving and do not repent. Thus, Tongues are a warning sign to unbelieving Jews to heed God's Word. Unbelieving Jews were present in all three recorded passages where tongues were used in Acts 2, Acts 10, and Acts 19.

### **Can Tongues be used as a private prayer language?**

Tongues are a warning sign to unbelieving Jews. When spoken in private to God alone, it edifies the speaker (1 Cor 14:4) in that the speaker recognizes and is encouraged by the gifting from the Spirit. However, because prayer to God should be with understanding (1 Cor 14:14,15), speaking to God in tongues will not be the preferred method of prayer. Once again, the intended purpose of tongues is a warning sign to the unbelieving Jews for the building up of the church.

### **Is it for every believer?**

No. Different people are gifted differently in the body of Christ. See 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28-30.

### **Can it be taught?**

No, it is a supernatural ability sovereignly given by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 12:4-11), not taught by man.

### **Is Romans 8:26,27 describing Tongues?**

No. Romans 8:26-27 describes groaning that cannot be uttered, not a known language that is spoken and heard by men. Secondly, Romans 8:26-27 refers to the Holy Spirit groaning and praying, rather than believers speaking. Romans 8:26-27 is really teaching us that the Holy Spirit helps believers pray in our weakness.

### **Must you speak in Tongues to prove that you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit?**

Someone who speaks in a previously unlearned language may be gifted by the Holy Spirit. However the inability to speak in tongues doesn't mean he is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The gift of Tongues is a spiritual gift sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit, who gives different individuals different gifts (1 Cor 12:11).

### **Does speaking in Tongues mean you are filled with the Holy Spirit?**

Not necessarily. The church at Corinth was an example of how carnal people can abuse the gift of Tongues. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be evidenced by obedience (Eph 5:18-28, Col 3:16-22, Gal 5:22-25) and boldness in declaring God's Word (Acts 4:8, 31, 6:5, 7:55).

### **Is it an angelic language?**

No, it is a known human language (see the reference in question 1).