

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

In our current series, we've been working our way through Paul's 1st Letter to the church in Corinth. And it should've become pretty clear by now, that this was a church in crisis... It was a church of broken relationships; pride; envy; some of its members had an elevated sense of self-importance & of having a higher spiritually...

Putting it bluntly, there were some in that church who just didn't love...

And it seems that a large part of their 'love problem', was in the way they were using their Spiritual Gifts.

Over the last few weeks, we've been hearing about how the Spiritual Gifts are given, not so much for the individual, but for the purpose of building up the church. Spiritual Gifts are given, so that each individual, can form part of the body, that we can be the body of Christ together...

And up until now, we've been talking in quite 'general terms' – We've been talking about Spiritual Gifts, generally...

But now, as we come into Chapter 14, Paul sharpens his focus – he zooms in on one **particular** spiritual gift, which had become a major issue for that church in Corinth... – The Gift of Tongues....

And I'm really glad, that Paul does give us some special teaching on this one gift, because it seems to me, that out of all of the Spiritual Gifts, **this** is the one that has been misused, in such a way that divides churches (more than any other)....

It is a gift which (throughout the years) has been:

- used and abused;
- It has been glorified and vilified
- It has been elevated in status, and it's been devalued.
- Some see it as a sign of the Holy Spirit, and some see it as the sign of the demonic.
- This gift, and the introduction of this gift, But more particularly, the **misuse** of this gift, and the **misunderstanding** of this gift, has split churches and divided denominations.

And it's done this ever since the very first generation of the Christian church, as we can see in this very letter that we're studying at the moment...

If it wasn't for the gift of tongues, we wouldn't have the greatest Biblical passage ever written on "Love". That passage on love (we studied a couple of weeks ago) – the one we most often hear being read at weddings, was actually written because a church had misused the gift of tongues. And they had elevated this gift up to a level that caused the people to show anything but love to one another.

What a terrible indictment on a church, that they would become so caught up in their own spiritual ecstasy, that they lost their concern for each other – ... they lost their love for each other – ... they began to consider themselves more better than the other, and more spiritual than the other.....

Now, when it comes to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gift of tongues is no better than any other Spiritual Gift, and yet the gift of tongues is nearly always the first gift that I'm asked about. It is one of the most controversial of all of the gifts. And it is probably the most disagreed about of the gifts. And so I reckon, it's quite fitting for us to spend a bit of time, searching the Scriptures for what God has to say about the gift of Tongues.

And as we begin, I want to change what we call it. So far today, I've been using the word "Tongues". I would like to change that to the word "Languages", because that's what it is. The Greek word is γλῶσσα, **tongue; language; utterance**. It's something that you say. It's a language. *Years ago, it would have been quite normal to say "Our South Africans speak a different tongue – they speak Afrikaans." But today, we'd be more likely to say "They speak a different language." ...*

*And of course, **one** of my South African mates is very quick to assure me, that not only is Rugby the game they play in heaven, but when the bible talks about "Tongues of angels", it's talking about Afrikaans....*

The gift of tongues has always been a supernatural ability to speak in another language that you have never learned. And usually, the person who is speaking in these "Languages" doesn't even know what they are saying. But the people who hear it – those who's language it is – understand very well what is being said.

And so I'm going to call it "the gift of Languages."... We need to de-mystify this gift.

So, the first question is "What is it?" And I've already really answered that – it's the gift of being able to speak in another language that you've never learned. In the book of Acts, chapter 2, when the Holy Spirit came upon the early church, they spoke in languages. At the time, there was a great festival in Jerusalem, and so there were lots of visitors from other countries, and when they heard the people speaking in languages, it says **Acts 2:** ⁶ ..., a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?-- we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

So some people saw what was going on, and said "Oh, they're drunk." And poo Poohed it. But others knew that God was doing something new and amazing, and asked "What does it mean?" And we still essentially have those two groups of people in the world today – some who are sceptical about the gift of languages, and who will say "That's a load of codswallop", and others who recognise that God is at work and they seek Him because of it. Which are we?

Let's move on.

Much to my wife's irritation, when I give gifts I like to give gifts that are useful (rather than decorative). And on that point, God and I have a lot in common... God gives gifts that are useful. So, what use is the gift of languages? Well, I personally, don't have this gift, so I haven't experienced it myself, but these are the uses as I understand them:

1. It enables people of another language to hear the praises of God that they would otherwise be denied – such as the Acts 2 example that we read just a couple of moments ago. So you can understand, that in an overseas missionary situation, it'd be very valuable. Or even in a multi-lingual society, it could be quite useful.
2. Secondly, and most commonly, it can be used as a private communication, or a private prayer language between the person with the gift of languages and God. In V2, it says that the **one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God**

The gift of languages is pretty much always very closely linked with those who have a gift of intercession, or a gift of praying. Sometimes you just don't know what to pray. **Romans 8:**²⁶**We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.** And for me, there are times when I just physically groan "God, I just don't know what to pray..."... And I groan... But at these times, people

with the Spiritual gift of Languages, are given words to pray, and they don't even know what they are...

And it seems as if the gift of languages is usually to do with a prayerful, worshipful, praising of God. At Pentecost, they said: “**we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages!**”, . And again here, in Chapter 14, we learn that praying in Languages, is praising God with our Spirit. ¹

3. And the third use for the gift of languages is to bring a message from God to a church. But this is only possible, if there is **another** gift present and active in that church – the gift of interpretation... And so, one person speaks a message in another language, and then another person interprets this into a message that we can understand.

So that's how the gift of languages is used.

But, why so much controversy?...

The gift of languages, out of all of the Spiritual gifts, seems to have been singled out to form two extreme positions – neither of them Biblical. The first gives **too much** emphasis on the Gift of languages, and says “It is a must have”, and the second denies it altogether – That's the two extremes.

When I was 18, some friends of Mum & Dad came to visit. And when I came in from work for smoko, we were talking, and they asked me, “Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?”

*Well, that question really rocked me, because I believed that I had. Jesus made a promise. He said, **Luke 11:**¹³ **If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"***

And I said to them, "Well, I've prayed and asked God for His Holy Spirit, I've earnestly asked to be filled, so I believe that I have received the Holy Spirit."

And they said, "Do you speak in tongues?" "No." "Well you're not filled with the Spirit then" they said. "Would you like to be?" "And I said, well, Yes, I would."

And so they laid hands on me, and prayed that I would receive the Holy Spirit.

After the prayer, they said, "Right, speak in tongues." "What?" "Speak in tongues". "How?" "Just open your mouth and start making noise. It'll come." And I opened my mouth and made some noises that would pass for what I had heard of the gift of languages, and they said "Yep, yep, you've got it. Keep going. You've got it."

But you see, all along, I knew it was my making those noises and not the Holy Spirit. I could make noises that would pass in any Pentecostal meeting as the gift of languages, but I know that I do not have the gift. I do not and cannot speak in languages. At this point, God has not given me that gift.

But the experience that I had as an 18 year old lad is common. And these well-meaning folk had been taught, (as they tried to

teach me), that **every** Christian who is filled with the Spirit (or **baptised** with the Spirit), can speak in tongues, (or has the gift of languages). For them, it's like the litmus test – it's the great dividing line – “Can you speak in tongues?” - Yes? - you're in – You're baptised in the Holy Spirit.

“No? You can't speak in other languages...”, well you are not yet baptised in the Spirit... Let me pray for you so that you are, and just as soon as you can speak in tongues, we will know you're filled with the Spirit – we will know that you're anointed.

This my friends, has become the key dividing line between Pentecostal denominations and others. We love them to bits – our brothers and sisters in these churches, but there is a line that divides us.

Australia's largest Pentecostal denominationⁱⁱ has a statement of “what we believe”. And in that statement, they articulate it, better than I can explain it. It says:

“We believe that in order to live the holy and fruitful lives that God intends for us, we need to be baptised in water and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to use spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues which is the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.”ⁱⁱⁱ”

Alright, that pretty much articulates the position of **most** Pentecostal denominations... *speaking in tongues ... is the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.*

Generally, in Pentecostal churches, If you can speak in tongues – that's proof that you're filled with the Holy Spirit.

– If you can't speak in tongues – you're **not** filled with the Spirit... It's as simple as that.

It sets up a spiritual test. And I know most people don't intend it as a spiritual elitism, but that's what it is, and this is something that the Bible very clearly guards against. The Scriptures are very clear, that we do **NOT** all have the same gifts, and we've looked at that pretty thoroughly over the last couple of weeks. 1 Corinthians ^{12: 9} **Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?....** Clearly the answer is no.

Now, as I said, we love our Pentecostal Brothers and Sisters to bits, but on this issue, we do stand in a different place...

So, where do our brothers and sisters come up with the teaching that **every** Christian, filled with the Spirit, can speak in tongues?

A very highly respected Biblical scholar, JI Packer. Said:

"If charismatics err, they err only by expecting to receive from God, whose face they seek, more than He has actually promised."^{iv}

You see, the gift of languages (as with every gift) is promised to the **church** – It is not promised to every individual. And yet, out of all of the Spiritual gifts, it is claimed that this particular gift, is given to every believer...

And those who hold to this teaching, look to occurrences in the book of Acts, where people were filled with the Holy

Spirit. Eg.:

- At Pentecost, in Acts 2, they were all together in one place, and they were **all** filled with the Holy Spirit. And the experience of speaking in other languages was **certainly dominant**... But it says “**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit**” – it doesn't say that they all spoke in other languages, but it certainly was dominant.
- In Acts 10, the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles. The Holy Spirit came upon a group of people. How did they know? They heard them speaking in other languages and extolling God. Does it say that **each of** them spoke in other languages? No, it doesn't say that. They may have, but we're not told that.
- Similarly, in Acts 19, Paul laid his hands on a group of 12 men, **the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying**. Once again, I want you to notice, what it doesn't say – It doesn't say that they **all** spoke in tongues, or that every single one of them prophesied – It was the experience of the group.

If I were to say to you, “*The circus troop came to town last week. They were singing and dancing, and tumbling and juggling, and lion taming, and trick riding on horses, and they were doing acrobatics on the trapeze, and clowning around....*”

- Would you expect that the clowns were also doing the acrobatics on the trapeze?

- Would you expect that the dancers were also taming the lion?...

Of course not. You would expect each of those circus individuals to be working in the area of their gifting, each one, using their own gifts, to form the complete circus troop.

As we read of the Holy Spirit coming upon the church, the gift of languages was an easily recognisable sign that the gifts of the Holy Spirit had come to that church. Why do we try to make “individual” what is clearly “corporate”? It was a sign that the Holy Spirit had come to a whole group of people.

Jesus said, **Mark 16:** ¹⁷ *And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new languages;* ¹⁸ *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."* And all of these things happened in the early church. But not every individual did each of these things.

It is a sign that the Spirit has come to the church – not the individual. The Bible very clearly shows us that we do **not** all have the same gift. And we should not **expect** to have the same gift.

OK. So some wrongly believe that every Christian, filled with the Holy Spirit has the gift of languages... And that becomes the test...

And yet some have exactly the **opposite** view. They believe that the gift of tongues was here for a time, but now it's disappeared ... And we covered that in depth last week. The cessationists believe that certain gifts ceased once the New Testament was written. I won't say anything more about it today – Just that, that view, is the second extreme. (If you want to know more, you can go on to www.bushdisciples.church , download the message, and have a listen.

So:

- One extreme says “Everyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit, can speak in other languages;
- The other extreme says “The gift of languages is a thing of the past – and therefore anyone who is speaking in tongues today, is actually demonic.”

That's the 2 extremes – neither of them are biblical – neither of them build up the church.

I might just throw in here, an even more extreme, and destructive position...

A couple of years ago, I was contacted by a lady, who was moving to St George, and she was looking for a church. And she wanted to know what we here at Bush Disciples thought about the gift of tongues...

She explained to me how a particular church had 'opened her eyes' to how speaking in tongues, is not only evidence of being filled with the Spirit, but it's the evidence of being saved itself... Genuine disciples of Jesus, are filled with the Holy Spirit. And I agree with that – that's true... And the extension

of that, is “If everyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit can speak in tongues, then if you can't speak in tongues, you're not saved...”

And I felt so sad for this lady, because she's been praying for the gift of tongues for years, and she still hasn't got it. And she's longing for the day that she gets the gift of tongues, so that she knows that she's saved...

Wow... What a terribly destructive teaching....

- Some say, “If you speak in tongues, you're demonic.”
- Others say, “If you don't speak in tongues, you're not baptised in the Holy Spirit.”
- And even others say, “If you don't speak in tongues, you're not saved.”

Why oh why, don't we just simply take it how we're taught in the bible – the gift of languages, is a Spiritual Gift, which is given to some, but we don't all have the same Spiritual gifts.

Alright, I think we've gone far enough for today... We haven't anywhere near covered, what Paul has to say about the Gift of Languages, so next week, we're going to continue studying the Gift of Languages, and how it should be used. And we'll probably be comparing it with the gift of Prophecy, because that's what Paul does...

So, what's the take-home message for today?

Well, I'd say the take-home message is “Don't be spiritually arrogant.”

- If you have the Spiritual Gift of Languages, don't expect that everybody else has to have it too.
- If you don't have the Spiritual Gift of Languages, don't judge everybody who does, by saying "It's not of God".

The gifts are given, for the building up of the body. The church needs the Spiritual Gift of Languages, but not everybody will have it.

More next week.

ⁱ 1 Corinthians 14:16-17

ⁱⁱ AOG (ACC – Australian Christian Churches)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.aog.org.au/What%20We%20Believe.page>

^{iv} JI Packer in www.holwick.com