



Discovering Your Design:

Preparing Christ's followers to change the world

TONGUES

DEFINITION: THE SPIRIT-GIVEN ABILITY TO "WORSHIP" (PRAY OR SING) GOD THROUGH A LANGUAGE NOT KNOWN TO THE SPEAKER.

Interpretation - the Spirit-given ability to bring intelligibility of the tongue message to the church for their mutual edification.

- The word is used to describe the organ in our mouth with which we taste or speak (Mark 7:33). It is also used to describe a language common to a group of people (Revelation 5:9).
- Literally it says different kinds of tongues/languages - this may suggest that sometimes tongues describe the speaking of known languages not known to the speaker (Ex. Pentecost - Acts 2), and in other cases not a known language - perhaps a heavenly language. In both cases the language bears a certain content that can be understood, even if it needs to be interpreted. (Some people argue that all tongues have to be a known language unknown to the speaker, but I Corinthians 14:2 says that there are tongues that no one will understand - this leaves the door open to a "heavenly language.")
- Speaking in tongues is giving praise to God (see Acts 2:11,26; 10:46).
- Sometimes the praise is manifest in a type of singing (cf. I Corinthians 14:15).
- Speaking in tongues sometimes implies prayer - Paul says in I Corinthians 14:15 "if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays. He also mentions earlier on (14:2) that tongues is talking to God.
- Speaking in tongues is speaking mysteries (cf. I Corinthians 14:2).
- The gift of tongues is different from prophecy in that tongues is directing praise to God, whereby prophecy is directing a message from God to His people.
- Tongue speaking edifies the individual - interpreted tongues edify the church.
- Tongues cannot be understood by the speaker unless they have the gift of interpretation. These two gifts must be a possibility since Paul encourages people with the gift of tongues to pray for the gift of interpretation (cf. I Corinthians 14:13). Although the person cannot understand the fact remains that it edifies them (cf. I Corinthians 14:4).
- Tongues are not ecstatic utterance, by that we mean when people speak in tongues they do not lose a sense of where they are or what they are saying. The guidelines for using this gift in I Corinthians 14: 27,28 make it clear that people are able to control the gift. (For example, if you start speaking in tongues you should do it one at a time, and only if there is an interpreter, and if there isn't one you should keep quiet - all these imply that you are able to exercise control over the gift!).
- Because tongues is a spiritual gift we know that not everyone has the gift of tongues (cf. I Corinthians 12:30).
- Speaking in tongues (or for that matter any other gift) is not to be mistaken for Christian maturity. Our maturity is not based on what gift we have been given, but on how we use the gift to build up the body and glorify Christ (cf. I Corinthians 12) notes, session 3.
- For more on the gift of tongues and College Church's position on it review the notes in Key Questions (page 1, #4 in appendix).

Biblical References: I Corinthians 12:10, 28, 30; 14:2-13, 26,27

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TONGUES & INTERPRETATION (continued)

Contribution: uninterpreted tongues make no contribution towards the edification of the church (the individual, but not the church); however tongues when interpreted focus our attention on our great God and warm our hearts to join in praise.

Biblical Examples: Disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2); Cornelius (Acts 10: 44-46) Paul (I Corinthians 14)

Characteristics - People with this gift:

- pray and praise God in a language unknown to them (tongues)
- are able to interpret the above so that everyone can understand it (interpretation)

Cautions:

- when the church gathers together it is for the purpose of building up the body as a whole—don't go to church wanting your own personal experience of the Spirit, go with a desire to build up the body (Fee 667, 676)
- don't use this gift publicly without someone who can interpret
- don't fall into the trap of the Corinthians and think you are more spiritual because you have this gift
- don't major on the minors - tongues is a minor theological issue and should not be a central dogma which brings division - the gifts are to lead to unity.