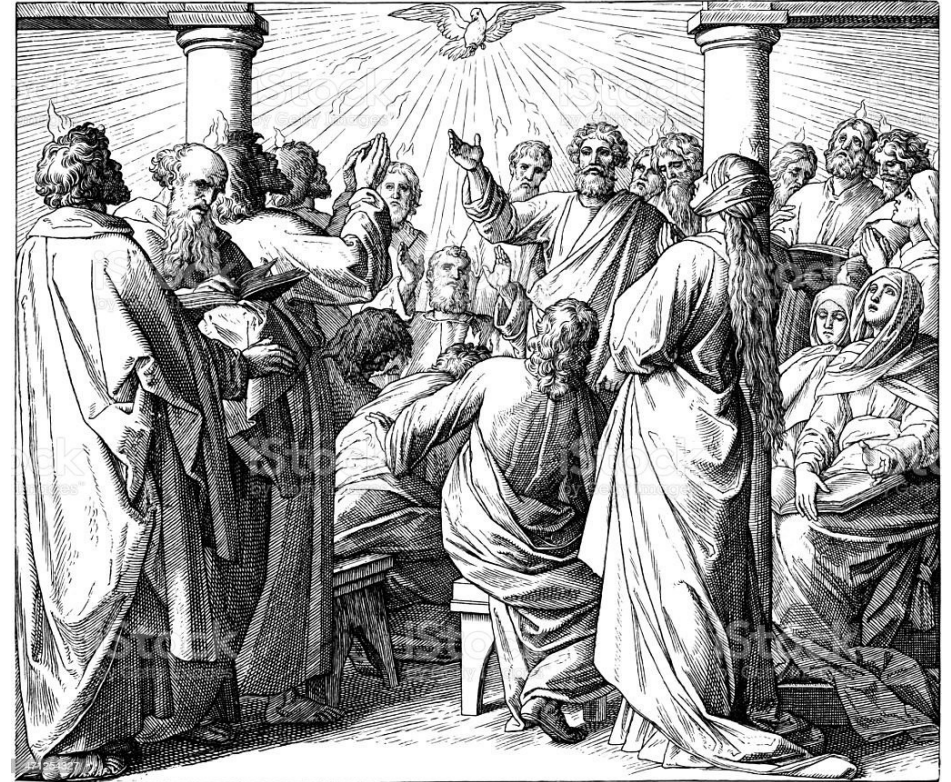




Lausanne
Free
Church

"believing all things written"



What is the gift of tongues?

An examination of what the Bible teaches

Lausanne Free Church

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Speaking in tongues

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First published October 2022

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.
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Appendix

Recommended books and sermons

Spiritual Gifts—5 sermons

by Pastor Alan Hill

<http://www.lausanne-english-church.com/sermons.html>

The Charismatic Phenomenon

by Dr. Peter Masters and John Whitcomb,

published by The Wakeman Trust

Tongues, Prophecy, Healings...

by Poh Boon Sing, published by Good News Enterprise Kuala Lumpur

1 Corinthians, A Welwyn Student Commentary

by Peter Naylor, published by Evangelical Press

The Real Baptism of the Holy Spirit

by Dr. Peter Masters, published by Wakeman Trust

That is why we do not read about tongues in the later letters in our Bibles. The gospel had gone to the Gentiles; God's judgement fell on Jerusalem in 70 AD. The sign was and is no longer needed.

By the second century AD the gift of tongues was a distant memory.

6) Conclusion

What have we learned?

- Tongues is a gift given by God to the church which involved the ability to speak a non understood language.
- Not every believer spoke in tongues.
- Tongues were a sign to the Jewish people that the Gospel was going out to the Gentiles.
- The gift of tongues is only mentioned three times in the book of Acts and then in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14. It is never mentioned in the other letters.
- Paul tells us that tongues as a gift would peter out once the full revelation of God had been given.
- The latter letters of the New Testament confirm this. It is not mentioned in Paul's instructions about how a church should be organised in 1 and 2 Timothy. It is not mentioned in John's and Peter's letters.
- Church history confirms that the gift of tongues died out.

In 1 Corinthians Paul tells us to seek a more excellent way: Love. 1 Corinthians 12:30 to 13:4 **But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**

The great need of the hour is not great gifts, but great grace. Gifts of the Spirit will come and go but the fruit of the Spirit will remain. Rather than seeking a gift that has ceased let us seek to be more like Christ in our character.

Introduction

For nearly 1,900 years there was almost universal agreement that the gift of tongues along with the other supernatural gifts like prophecy⁽¹⁾ and miracles died out within 100 years of the birth of the church.

Even until 70 years ago it was a fringe teaching amongst evangelicals. Today the majority of evangelical churches are charismatic—believing that the gift of tongues along with the other such gifts are for today.

This teaching is part of the “second blessing” teaching. This says that after a person becomes a Christian they should seek a second blessing from God usually called the baptism of the Spirit. One of the main evidences that you have been baptised in the Holy Spirit is that you speak in tongues.

As a young Christian I sought this gift and thought I had found it. I spoke in some kind of gibberish which no-one understood. I was told – “Don't worry that is the gift of tongues!”

Then I heard a series of talks on 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 by Stuart Olyott. It convinced me I did not have this gift and should not seek it. In this booklet I explain why.

Pastor Alan Hill
Lausanne Free Church

(1) For a discussion about prophecy, see my booklet entitled *Are there Prophets Today?* Copies available from the author.

1) What is the baptism of the Spirit?

We must begin by looking at the subject of baptism in the Spirit as this is very much linked with the speaking in tongues. Charismatics teach that Christians need a second blessing called the baptism of the Spirit and most teach that the evidence you have received this second blessing is that you speak in tongues.

So the first questions we must ask are: what is the baptism of the Spirit and who has been baptised in the Spirit?

The baptism of the Spirit is a gracious act of the Holy Spirit when he comes to dwell within a believer. It is so complete that it is called a baptism, an immersion.

We can link the baptism of the Spirit with the new birth that Jesus Christ speaks about in John 3:5 **Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”**

The phrase baptism of the Spirit is only mentioned 7 times in the New Testament. The first four all record John the Baptist saying that Christ would baptise with the Spirit in contrast to John’s water baptism.

The next two are in Acts. In Acts 1:5 Christ promises that the disciples would be soon baptised in the Spirit. In Acts 11:16 we have the mini-Pentecost experience involving Cornelius and his household. We will discuss this passage later.

The final reference is in 1 Corinthians 12:13. **For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

The last verse is the most important. This clearly teaches that all Christians are baptised in the Spirit at the moment of their conversion.

This is what Peter promised to those listening to his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: Acts 3:38-39 Then Peter said to them, **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Paul talks about 5 things: Prophecies, tongues, knowledge, faith, hope and love.

He tells us that there are three things that will pass away. What are they? Prophecies, tongues and knowledge.

Now it is interesting that he uses a different tense for prophecies and knowledge. He says that they will stop – like a car when it runs out of petrol. But for tongues he says that they will peter out – like a torch when the battery runs down.

When will they pass away? When **that which is perfect has come**. What is “that which is perfect”? What is the perfect of prophecies, tongues and knowledge? Surely it is the completed Word of God. Some today say that ‘**the perfect**’ refers to heaven, but this Greek word is never used in the Bible to describe Heaven.

Paul then tells us that three things abide. What are they? Faith hope and love. Paul tells us that there is one thing that never fails and is the greatest. What is it? Love.

When will faith and hope disappear? At a future point in time. When will faith turn to reality and hope to certainty? At the end of time, at the end of the world. Love will carry on.

So Paul says that the gift of tongues will peter out. Why? Because it was a message to the Jews that the Gospel was going to the Gentiles. Once the Gospel had gone to the Gentiles, you no longer need the sign!

The gift of tongues was like a fire of warning to the unbelieving Jews. It was lit that day and burnt brightly for a time in Jerusalem and then moved out into the surrounding lands as the gospel spread. Like a fire, the gift died out in the place where it had started and spread far and wide, until it had achieved its purpose. Then it gradually fizzled out.

Look at 1 Corinthians 12:28 to 30. **Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.**

A gift is a gift, given by God to who ever he chooses. Just as all were not apostles (in fact only 13!) so all were not given the gift of tongues.

5) Is this gift still for today?

Those in the church at Corinth had become obsessed with gifts so Paul tells them they have the priorities all wrong. The gift of tongues and others will pass away. He says this in 1 Corinthians 13.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

There are many other verses that support the teaching that at conversion a believer is fully immersed in the Holy Spirit. Look for instance at Romans 5: 1 to 5; Romans 8: 9 and 15; 1 Corinthians 6:11 to 30; Galatians 3:2; Ephesians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 1 John 4:12 to 13.

It is significant is that in none of the letters of the New Testament does any writer imagine a situation where a believer is not baptised in the Spirit or urge people to be baptised in the Spirit.

God may fill a Christian us afresh with the Holy Spirit (see for instance Acts 4:31-32 and Acts 7:55) but that is not being baptised in the Spirit.

This filling is the invisible empowering of the Holy Spirit which strengthens and enables us to serve him. It may come when we humbly ask God to help us in our service for him, (like Acts 4:31-32) or it may just be given when we need it (like Stephen in Acts 7:55).

2) What is speaking in tongues?

Speaking in tongues is only mentioned in two New Testament books: Acts and 1 Corinthians. In Acts we read of 3 occasions when people spoke in tongues. In 1 Corinthians Paul explains the purpose of the gift of tongues.

First we will look in Acts. When was the first-time people spoke in tongues? It was on the day of Pentecost. Acts 2: 1 to 12.

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, “Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “Whatever could this mean?”

The Holy Spirit came upon the 120 believers. What did they begin to do? Speak in “other tongues”.

We are told what that means in verses 8 to 11. The disciples were miraculously able to speak a foreign language. Some spoke one foreign language and others spoke another. At least 15 languages are listed.

So the gift of speaking in tongues is the gift of being able to speak instantly a foreign language that you do not know.

But there is more to the gift than that. The actual words were given by God and were on the same level as prophecy.

We know this from when Paul talks about the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians 14 verses 1 to 19. Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies is greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.

Acts 19: 1 to 6

And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”

**And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?”
So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”**

Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. Now the men were about twelve in all.

Here were some followers of John the Baptist who had not heard about Christ. They were stuck in a time warp! They were still in the dark about the Holy Spirit. So when Paul preaches to them about Christ and lays hands on them they receive the gift of tongues.

This like a mini Pentecost. Once again Jews are present. The unbelieving Jews in this case are those who thought that the teaching and baptism of John the Baptist was sufficient.

That is the last time tongues are mentioned in Acts. Luke, that great historian makes no further mention of this gift.

4) Is this gift for everyone?

Now many Charismatics will claim that speaking in tongues is a gift that all believers can receive. But is that true?

Paul clearly says no, it is not a gift for everyone not even in Paul’s day.

Gospel age suddenly the Gospel was being declared in the languages of the Gentiles!

Therefore the gift of tongues was a sign to the Jews that God's blessing, which they had rejected, was being given to the Gentiles.

It is an interesting fact that in Acts we only read of people speaking in tongues on two more occasions. On each occasion Jewish people were present. Let us briefly look at them:

Acts 10

The situation in the church is that the Gospel has gone out to the Jewish people but not the Gentiles. Peter is then given the vision of the unclean food on a sheet coming down from heaven and told to eat; the message being that what God has declared to be clean he can eat. Now there is a knock at the door and he is invited to travel to Caesarea to meet Cornelius, a Gentile Roman soldier.

Once there, Peter explains the Gospel. Then read what happens: Acts 10: 44 to 48 **While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.**

Here again as in Acts 2, tongues is a sign that the Gospel is going to Gentiles. Peter is being forcibly told this by the fact that Gentiles receive the gift of tongues. Peter is the unbelieving Jew at this point.

Now it is very interesting what Peter says when he reports on these events to the church in Jerusalem: Acts 11: 15 to 17. Verse 15 **"The Holy Spirit fell upon them as upon us at the beginning".**

The implication is that this gift of tongues had not fallen upon anyone since Pentecost!

But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me. Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel.

Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.

I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

What is Paul teaching? When a person spoke in a tongue most people did not understand. Why? Because the person was speaking in a foreign language, and unless that happened to be a language that you knew, you would not understand what was being said!

Paul therefore says that if someone speaks in tongues, he or she should pray that God will give someone the gift to interpret or translate what has been said. This will mean that the whole church can benefit.

Some will claim that the gift of tongues that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians is different from that on the day of Pentecost. This is based on 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 **Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels.** However Paul does not say that he speaks with the tongue of an angel any more that he claims he HAS all knowledge or be able to move mountains.

Also remember that 1 Corinthians was written before Acts. Paul's companion Luke (who wrote Acts) would have read 1 Corinthians. He chose to use the same Greek word to describe what happened on the Day of Pentecost as Paul used. Why? Because he was describing the same gift!

So speaking in tongues is a prophetic gift that God gave to the church. It enabled people to instantly speak a foreign language.

3) Why did God give this gift?

Every gift that God gives is for a purpose. The purpose of all the gifts is to edify the church. Gifts are never given for personal edification. This includes tongues. They were given to benefit others.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 **But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.**

Now what is the purpose of the gift of tongues? I always ask this question of Christian friends who claim to have the gift of tongues. Yet in 30 years no-one has replied by quoting the verse in the Bible that gives the answer!

What is that verse? 1 Corinthians 14:22. **Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers.**

God gave the gift of tongues as a sign to unbelievers. He did not give tongues for personal edification, not even for the benefit of the church, but for unbelievers.

What does verse 22 mean? To understand we need to look at the verse in context. 1 Corinthians 14: 20 to 25.

Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.

In the law it is written: "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord. Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe.

Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.

Paul wants the Christians in Corinth who think so highly of tongue speaking to have a mature understanding about this gift (verse 21).

First he quotes from the Isaiah. Verse 21 In the law it is written: **"With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me," says the Lord.**

For 1,500 years the Jews had a wonderful blessing: the word of God in their own language! God spoke to the world in Hebrew! But the Jewish people in general rejected God and his word.

So the Lord prophesied through Isaiah that a day was coming when God would speak to his unbelieving people in other languages.

Isaiah's warning was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The unbelieving Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Now, at the birth of the