



Tongues as a Tool.

The value of the gift of tongues today, when properly understood and used.
1 Corinthians 12:7-10 NASB

Full Disclosure: In the desire to help heal the breach between Evangelicals and Charismatics, the Lord has led the present writer to start, or further, a healthy conversation about one of the points of difference which has held the two groups of Christians at arm's length. By training and ministry experience, I am an Evangelical. I do not have the gift of tongues. I have sought it honestly. I've been prayed over by the "best." I am still very open to however the Holy Spirit may choose to manifest Himself in and through me. Readers from both camps can be assured that I am at peace with the gifting He has given me. I now know that God has gifted me appropriately to help bridge the gap. I am best positioned to do so as a "Non-Glossalic Charismatic" type of Evangelical.

If you have stopped laughing, and are still willing to read further, let me share that I have been a pastor for over fifty years, in four Evangelical churches. In all of them, I have welcomed Charismatic brothers and sisters in Christ with full embrace. Stories? Yes. Problems? Not that many. My last 22-year pastorate became a "laboratory" for healing the breach. My website, MoreofHisFullness.com, features articles that are the "Lab Notes" of our learnings. The teaching below is part of our practical journey to become a "Pleromic" church. That comes from the Greek term **pleroma**, meaning "fullness. We are seeking the fullness of God through the fullness of the Word and the Fullness of the Spirit. (See my monographs on "Healing the Breach.") Let's start:

The Broader Context: The Spirit is the **artist**. Jesus is the **subject**. We as gifted believers are the **medium**. The Church is the **canvass**. The world is the **gallery**. These are the colors on this Holy Artist's pallet: **1 Corinthians 12:7-10, 14, 18** NASB [Mechanical layout of the text for emphasis.]

⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For -

1. to one is given the WORD OF WISDOM through the Spirit, and
2. to another the WORD OF KNOWLEDGE according to the same Spirit;
3. ⁹ to another FAITH by the same Spirit, and
4. to another GIFTS OF HEALING by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and
5. to another the EFFECTING OF MIRACLES, and
6. to another PROPHECY, and
7. to another the DISTINGUISHING OF SPIRITS,
8. to another VARIOUS KINDS OF TONGUES, and
9. to another the INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES.

¹⁰ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. . . . ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. . . . ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

Each gift cannot be understood apart from the Giver.

A gift is not a possession of a person, but a manifestation of a Person.

It's not "it," but "Him."

A "tongue" is a tool, not a toy.

Discussion Points: Consider carefully and improve these ideas in a group with a mature facilitator.

1. **Definition:** The gift of tongues, or languages, can be defined as the supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit in certain believers by which they are given the ability to speak in a language which they had not previously learned, nor do they understand as they speak.
2. **Content:** What is spoken through the gift of tongues is a Spirit-prompted prayer and/or praise to God which is given audible expression in a language unknown to the natural mind of the speaker. This is what was evident at Pentecost (Acts 2:7-11) and in church gatherings (1 Corinthians 14:16).
3. **Special Clarification on Praying in the Spirit:** Evangelicals would have me clarify that we are all commanded by the Word of God to pray in the Spirit. Yet, not all Spirit-filled believers may have a “prayer language,” as tongues are often designated by Charismatics. Biblically, there are more than one way to pray in the Spirit. Consider:
 - a. **Gift of Tongues:** That tongues are a form of praying in the Spirit is seen clearly in 1 Corinthians 14:2. Yet, it is not the only way to “pray in the Spirit,” as some have claimed.
 - b. **Unutterable Groanings:** One may also be praying under the anointing of the Spirit with “groanings too deep for utterance” (Romans 8:26-27). Many Evangelicals experience this.
 - c. **Your Native Language:** Then again, we must allow that a person can and should pray under the anointing of the Spirit using their own language of birth. Look at Ephesians 6:18 carefully. And Paul says he can pray with his mind, or understanding, also. See the whole context of 1 Corinthians 14:14-19. Five words with the understanding can be anointed by the Spirit, too.
4. **Purpose:** There are several biblically described purposes for the sign gift of biblical tongues:
 - ❑ **A Sign of the Advent of the Holy Spirit:** Spirit-inspired “languages” at the Feast of Pentecost was a sign that God was beginning and directing the church to take the gospel to the whole world. Sixteen languages and dialects were notes, that communicated to Jews present of the diaspora. In the Temple, probably at the Portico of Solomon (Acts 5:12), where Hebrew would have been expected on a feast day, God poured forth a miraculous message of hope to the broadest audience that could pierce to the depth of their hears.
 - ❑ **A Sign of Warning to Unbelieving Jews of Impending Judgement:** Paul makes this clear that tongues also were a sign to unbelievers of impending judgment. See what he said in 1 Corinthians 14:20-22 as an explanation of Acts 2. And refer to Isaiah 28:11-13 from which Paul quotes. Some Jews had rejected the sign as resulting from drunkenness.
 - ❑ **Group Edification:** Secondly, tongues, when interpreted, can bring edification to a gathering of believers as does prophecy. 1 Corinthians 14:12-13.
 - ❑ **Self-Strengthening:** Personally, he who speaks in tongues edifies himself, that is, builds himself up spiritually (1 Corinthians 14:4). Self-edification has value, although, in the church, the priority is to build up others. Tongues are a form of “praying in the Spirit.”
5. **Division Occurred:** The “Charismatic Renewal,” which began in 1960, was a powerful work of the Holy Spirit, intended, in my view, to prepare the Church for the return of Christ. **The Holy Spirit’s fresh outpouring was never intended by God to be the source of division** (Ephesians 4:3).

One of the greatest stratagems of Satan is **division**. To thwart the will of God, the enemy succeeded in dividing Christians over the issue of tongues. **Immaturity on both sides** of the Evangelical/Charismatic rift has hindered the church from realizing the fullness of Christ – which comes through both the Word and the Spirit. We all were “children” then. It is time we become mature, and put away childish things. Let’s start by facing this issue that has divided us.

Yes, there is a genuine, valuable gift of tongues – then and now!

6. **Etiquette**: Paul spoke very directly to the question of how tongues are to be used in the church so that everything is done decently, in order, and in a way that edifies all. Etiquette is courtesy.
7. **Praying in the Spirit**: All believers are enjoined to pray in the Spirit, and all must obey (Jude 21). We are instructed to pray in the Spirit at all times for all men (Ephesians 6:18). While all do not speak in tongues, all are called upon to pray in the Spirit. Let me restate that the “mode” we employ may differ. Biblically, praying in the Spirit may take one of three forms.
- **Tongues**: Some have a “prayer language,” which can be vocalized or used privately. It is the Spirit given ability to speak in a language unknown to the speaker. It is primarily a sign gift, it has understandable content when interpreted. The Spirit may prompt someone to speak God’s heart (i.e., interpret) in an understandable language (1 Corinthians 14).
 - **Groanings**: Others pray in the Holy Spirit within their hearts with tears and “groanings too deep for utterance” (Romans 8:26). It is a brooding, an aching, that alerts us that God within is talking to God on the throne of heaven. Often, when waiting on the Lord in this pregnant silence, the Spirit may prompt that person or someone else to pray in line with His intercession. But not always, or immediately. Wait. Watch. Let the Lord lead.
 - **Understanding**: Others have evidenced a powerful anointed unction while praying understandable words. Even people who pray in tongues or with Spirit-prompted groanings can choose to pray “in the Spirit” with their understanding also (1 Corinthians 14:13-19).
8. **Valuing Tongues as a “Sign” Gift Today**: What are the values of a manifestation of the Spirit in tongues today? How can non-glossalics folks like me receive the “common good” from the use of such a gift in an assembly? (1 Cor. 12:7) Here’s how I value tongues, and let them edify me:
- **A Sign of God’s Presence**: This supernatural touch from heaven alerts me to the presence of the invisible God right here, right now. I am pulled away from every other preoccupation to welcome the Spirit of Christ to have preeminence in this holy moment. Tongues call me to account to be walking in the Spirit with my fellow saints.
 - **A Sign of a Revelatory Moment**: It is time for me to listen. The God the Holy Spirit, Who I have enthroned in my heart is speaking with God the Father who is enthroned of heaven. (Romans 8:26-27; 1 Corinthians 14:2.) The Spirit is making intercession for the saints. I wait in silent faith. I groan with the passion the Spirit expresses. Will the Spirit allow me to “listen in” by way of an interpretation or some other prophetic gift? If no interpretation, I simply, quietly, pray forth my heart’s agreement with the Spirit. “Yes, Lord! Amen!”
 - **A Sign of Kingdom Priorities**: For me, tongues are still a vital reminder that the great commission is not yet fulfilled. That edifies me. God is winning people from every tongue, tribe, nation, and people. Tongues are a sign of the world-wide scope of the kingdom. Let’s anticipate that we may be about to receive fresh encouragement, empowerment and direction for our role in advancing Christ’s kingdom locally and globally. (See Acts 13:2-3.)

Summary: Genuine tongues are valuable, and to be valued, in the church today. Tongues are a sign to the lost and saved alike regarding God’s presence in grace and power. Our growing maturity, however, must lead us to regard tongues correctly:

1. The gift of tongues is **a tool**, not **a toy**. So, gifts are to be seen as “Him,” not as “It.”
2. Tongues should lead us to a **kingdom focus**, not a self-focus.
3. The Holy Spirit is the **source of unity**. We are to be united in both the Word and the Spirit.
4. God is **Omni-lingual**. He speaks everyone’s language. He hears everyone’s heart cry.
5. Let’s rejoice that there is a new season dawning where maturing saints from both sides of the great Evangelical/Charismatic divide are uniting in pursuing the fullness of Christ through a healthy “*Pleromic*” unity. Please embrace this unity. The Lord would be so pleased.