

The Gift of Tongues (Part 3)

by Chuck Smith

The gift of tongues is a gift that enables believers to express their praise and worship to God in a language that is deeper than their intellect, and it is received by faith, trusting the Holy Spirit to prompt the sounds we make.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1-16, Matthew 8:8, Matthew 9:20-22, Romans 8:26-27, 1 Corinthians 13:1-14, Galatians 3:2, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "The Gift of Tongues", "Faith and Love"

Description

Chuck Smith discusses the gift of tongues, emphasizing that it involves speaking in a language that the speaker does not understand, which can be a challenge to the intellect. He encourages believers to remain open to receiving this gift, as it serves as a covenant between them and God, allowing for deeper worship and expression of praise. Smith highlights the importance of faith in receiving God's gifts, noting that intellectual barriers often hinder acceptance. He also stresses that the true measure of spiritual maturity is love, not the possession of spiritual gifts like tongues. Ultimately, he calls for unity and love among believers, regardless of their experiences with the gift of tongues.

Transcript

First Corinthians 14 mentions speaking in an unknown tongue several times. The Greek word is glossa, which means tongue. The word unknown is added by the translators and it is correct according to the context. It is speaking in a tongue that the speaker himself does not understand. It could be a known tongue or known language as Paul said, "Though I speak with the tongues of men..." Or it could be perhaps the dialect of heaven or the language of angels. "Though I speak with the tongue of men and of angels..."

Speaking in tongues is extremely difficult on the human intellect. In fact our intellects rebel against uttering sounds that we do not understand. It is an affront to the intellect and this is why many people very sincerely declare that they do not see any reason or purpose for the gift of tongues. Why should I speak to God in a language or a tongue that I myself do not understand? It is an insult to the intellect, and thus, it is understandable that a person would feel that way.

However, if God has given a gift there must be something worthwhile in having that gift or else why would God give it? I personally want to be open to whatever God might want to do for me in order to enhance my walk with Him. I desire to be everything that God would have me to be and I desire to have everything that God would desire for me to have. I do not want to close any doors to God. I do not want to say, "God I

want everything but maybe not that." I just want everything that God knows is necessary and good for me. I do not want to close any door to what He might want to do in my life.

Because it is an insult to the intellect, I believe that this is the reason why many people have not received this gift of tongues. They have intellectual difficulties that hinder their faith. Have you ever stood on the street corner in a foreign land and heard the people talking to each other in their native dialects? I find it extremely fascinating because the sounds that they are making to each other are totally unintelligible to me. And I am amazed that they can actually be communicating their ideas to each other with such strange sounds. It baffles me. And I realize that they must be communicating intelligently and intelligibly to each other, yet it is so totally foreign to my own ear and to my intellect. Their talking to each other often sounds just like jabber.

Our word barbarian comes from the Greek language and the Greeks called those who spoke in languages they did not understand "barbars." They felt that the Greek was the cultural language and anybody else that did not speak Greek but communicated to each other in some other tongue were barbars. To the Greeks the language just sounded like barbar. And thus, we got the word barbarian from the barbar-arian or from the Greeks who considered everyone who communicated in any language other than Greek as a barbar.

Language is actually an agreement between people that certain sounds express certain ideas. We have a covenant or an agreement with each other. We are able to form certain sounds and we have agreed that these sounds are conveying these particular ideas. And as long as you and I have this covenant and we have this agreement that this is what these sounds mean, we can communicate to each other in these sounds, which to some foreigners would sound like barbar. They would sound strictly unintelligible to them. But we are able to communicate our ideas to each other because of this covenant or this agreement that you and I agree upon what a particular sound is conveying. This is the thought or this is the idea that this sound is conveying.

So it would be possible to actually invent a language, provided that we agree that these particular sounds were expressing these particular ideas. So "ugh" means "let us go out after service and get a hot fudge sundae." "Nugh" means "who's buying?" "Tug" means "I will treat." And "lug" means "you are on!" So after service tonight you could say, "Ugh." And I would say, "Nugh." You would say, "Tug?" And I would say, "Lug." And we would head off to the ice-cream shop because we have made an agreement that this is what these sounds mean. It is a covenant that we make with each other by which we express our thoughts and our ideas with sounds that we agree upon.

I see the gift of tongues as a covenant between you and God. That by faith I am going to utter certain sounds that I do not understand, but I am going to trust the Holy Spirit to prompt those sounds so that they are a language of praise and worship from my spirit unto God. I make that covenant with God. I am going to trust the Holy Spirit to prompt the sounds. Although I do not understand them, "Lord I trust that You will understand these sounds to be praise, to be thanksgiving, to be worship, and to be the expression of my spirit unto You." It is a complete act of faith that my intellect will rebel against.

But it is also a confession of my intellectual limitations. I do not have an adequate vocabulary to express to God the extreme joy and thanksgiving at the abundance of His grace that He has manifested to me. I often find that words are inadequate. Severn Orolus said, "When prayer reaches its ultimate, words are impossible."

In 2 Samuel 7, David came to that place at the time in his life when he was sitting there in his palace watching people go up to the tent to worship God and he thought, "This is not right. I am living here in the luxury of this beautiful palace and God's house is a tent. I want to make God a house that will exceed anything ever built." He called his friend Nathan the prophet and said, "Nathan, I have been thinking. I want to build a house for God, a glorious house for the Lord, where people can come and meet with God. It will excel everything." Nathan said, "Splendid idea, David. Do what is in your heart."

And that night the Lord came to Nathan and said, "Nathan, you spoke too quickly. You spoke out of turn. It is good that David wants to build Me a house but his hands are so bloody. He is a man of war. It would be inconsistent for him to build Me a house, being the man of war that he is. So you have to go back to David tomorrow and tell David that he cannot build a house for Me. Now I know that is going to be greatly disappointing to him. But you tell him that I will build him a house and there shall never cease from his seed one to sit upon the throne.

Nathan the prophet came back and said, "David, I have got some bad news and some good news. Bad news first--you cannot build a house for God. Your hands are bloody. It would be inconsistent with God for you to build Him a house. But God said He is going to build you a house and there never will cease one from your seed sitting upon the throne."

And so David went in before the Lord and he was overwhelmed to think that God would bring the Messiah from his seed. This just overwhelmed him. And he went in before the Lord and he knelt and he prayed and he said, "O Lord, You took me from the sheep coat, from following after the sheep. And You made me the ruler over Your people." He remembered his humble beginnings. He was just a shepherd. "Look, You took me from following the sheep over the hillsides in Bethlehem. And You made me the ruler over Your people. And if that is not enough, now You speak to me of the future and of what is to come."

Now David in my opinion was probably one of the most articulate men who ever lived. He was a man who had a gift of expression of praise second to none. Whenever I desire to expand my praises and my worship of God, I will turn to his psalms in order to be refreshed. In the things that God has done and the ways by which praise can be expressed to God for His mercies, His grace, His goodness, His kindness, and in all of these things I always turn to David because he was so articulate. But as articulate as David was he found that when he saw the true grace of God he was so overwhelmed by it that he said, "What more can David say? I mean, Lord, I am speechless. What can I say? I do not have a vocabulary, Lord, that can adequately express what I feel inside in gratitude, in love, in appreciation for what You are and what You have done."

So I experience limitations much more than did David. I find that my vocabulary is limited in my endeavor to express to God my thanksgiving, my appreciation, my praise for what God is and for what God has done for me. So often I say, as David said, "Lord, what can I say? You know my heart. You know what I feel, but I cannot express it. I do not have words that can express it. How much I do love You and how much I do appreciate, Lord, all that You have done for me." And so, it is an acknowledgment of my limitations. I cannot fully express that which I would like to express to God of the feelings that I have deep in my spirit.

And there are also times when I have intellectual limitations in regards to praying for somebody. I do not always know how to pray as I ought. I know that it is important when I pray that I pray according to the will of God. John said,

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. (1 John 5:14)

I do not believe that prayer should ever be intended on our part, to change the mind of God. Through prayer I seek to discover the heart of God, but I do not want to change the mind of God--if that were possible. I do not think it is. I think He loves us too much to change His mind concerning us, because His will and His desires for us are the best.

But I do not always know how to pray as I ought. I do not know what God is doing. I do not know what God's plan is. I do not know what the future holds. I do not know what purposes God might be seeking to work out in my life or in the life of that person I am praying for. I do not know what God has purposed through a trial that others are going through. I want to pray for them, but I do not want to pray contrary to God's good purposes or God's good will. And so, I pray and I tell God what I would like to see, and I tell Him if He is open for suggestions I have a few, but in the final analysis--"Lord, Your will be done."

But Paul says,

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. (1 Corinthians 14:14)

Well if the Spirit is praying then you can have the confidence that you are praying according to the will of God, though you still do not understand what the will of God may be.

But as the result of being able to be aided by the Spirit in worship, in praise, and in prayer, according to the will of God, it is a very restful experience. I can rest in the fact that I am adequately praising God. I can rest in the fact that He receives the praise and worship and understands it as the expression of the deepest area of my being--deeper than my intellect. It is deeper than my conscious level. From that deep area of the spirit, God can receive and understand and appreciate the love and the praise that I am offering to Him.

And also, He can know and understand the fact that I want His work and His will wrought in the situations for which I am praying. I am praying according to His will and thus it is very restful. It is very satisfying and it is very fulfilling to just rest in the fact that God understands and interprets my spirit-aided prayer as worship and praise and intercession, as the case may be.

Now in the Pentecostal circles, they have developed various traditional ways by which they seek to help or aid a person to speak in tongues. And I have observed these methods through the years. One way is through the encouragement of the person to repeat a word over and over again--such as the word "glory, glory, glory, glory, glory" or "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Now if you repeat this word over and over and over again, in time your tongue will get twisted and a sound will come out that does not sound like glory. And a person, at that point, oftentimes begins then to speak in tongues.

I have often seen them take a person by the chin and as they are praising the Lord, shake their chin. And again, as you are trying to praise the Lord and someone is shaking your chin, there are sounds that sometimes come off that you do not understand, and often then a person begins to speak in tongues. There are those who will say, "Now repeat these sounds after me." And they, in praying for the person, will start to speak in tongues and encourage the person to sort of speak after them.

Now I used to look at all of these methods as totally reprehensible and unscriptural. I still look at them as unscriptural. But age does marvelous things for you as far as sort of mellowing you out. And I am much more mellow than I used to be. And I suppose if the Lord tarries and He allows me to tarry, I will even be more mellow as the years go by. I have found that some things that used to be so important are not that important anymore. Things that I thought I could not live without or I thought that it had to be this way, I have realized it does not and I can live without those things.

But in looking at these practices, as I say, I still see them as unscriptural but I see perhaps a principle that is at work. One of the most difficult obstacles that we have to overcome is our intellect. And if God has a gift for me, the only way I can receive God's gift is through faith. I have to receive the gifts of God by faith. Salvation is the gift of God. By faith I have to receive that gift of salvation for it to be mine. The Holy Spirit is a gift of God to me. I have to receive, by faith, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though it is there (a gift of God) yet it is not mine until I receive it by faith. I have to appropriate God's gifts through faith. I cannot earn them. I do not deserve them. They are mine as I appropriate them by faith.

I think that many times a person's faith is passive--if that is possible. I am not sure if it is or not. It may be an oxymoron to say passive faith--I am not quite sure. But many times a person believes that God is able and that what God will perhaps one day do it, and that would seem to be sort of a passive faith, to me. Yes, I believe God can do it and perhaps sometime He will. That seems to be sort of a passive faith to me or what I would classify as passive faith. I believe that active faith declares, "I believe God is doing it right now or that He will do it when certain conditions are met."

In Matthew 9, the woman who had the issue of blood for twelve years felt, in her heart, that if she could but touch the hem of Jesus' garment, that she would be healed of her plague. And so she made her way through the crowd and grasped the hem of His garment and Jesus felt that the virtue had gone out of Him. And the woman was immediately healed. And when Jesus faced her for what she had done, He said to her, "Your faith hath made thee whole."

Now her faith was set to be triggered by an action. She thought, "The moment I touch Him, I am going to be healed." So there was that point of the activating of her faith and she had said in her mind that the time and the place by which the faith would be activated was the moment she could touch the hem of His garment. Now I believe that she could have said, "The moment He smiles at me I will be whole." And she could have made that the point of contact. And she could have kept trying to run in front of Jesus smiling real big and hoping that He would smile back. And the moment that He responded to her smile, she would have been healed. And Jesus would have said, "Who smiled at Me?"

But I believe that we can set places for the releasing of faith. I really believe that this is the value and the reason why we are told to lay hands on the sick because it gives them that point of releasing the faith or activating the faith. I know that when the elders come and they lay hands on me, the moment they lay their hands on me God is going to touch me and I am going to be healed. Or the anointing with oil is the same idea. The moment that I am anointed with oil and prayed over by the elders, I know that God is going to heal me. And it is a point of releasing or of activating faith.

In Matthew 8, the Centurion whose servant was ill said to Jesus, "I know that all You have to do is say the word and my servant will be healed." And so, that is all he knew was that just the word of Jesus would heal his servant. And He said, "I have not seen so great a faith." This man had the faith in the power of the words of Jesus and the moment Jesus spoke the word he believed and his servant was made whole, in

that very hour.

Now getting back to these Pentecostal practices of shaking the chin or saying "glory, glory," I think that when they repeat the word until their tongue gets twisted and an unintelligible sound comes out, when they hear this sound, I think that many times their faith is activated. They think, "I have it! Praise the Lord!" And by faith they receive the gift--it is received by faith. And I think that often that is the thing that triggers their faith.

So rather than condemning them as I used to do, I think that I may see a principle at work. I think they have accidentally stumbled across a way by which they have helped to trigger a person's faith to believe that they have received the gift of God. And when that faith is triggered they do receive the gift by faith. It is a wonderful thing to have your faith triggered and to have that moment when you say, "Yes, I have it."

Many years ago we were conducting a Bible class in Newport Beach in a home on Monday nights. This one lady had been attending the class quite regularly and we were teaching on the subject of the Holy Spirit. We were in the house of some people who were Episcopalians and it was at that time when many of the Episcopalians were receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so, this lady requested that we pray for her to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at the close of the class--which we did. And when she got home her husband, who was a football coach, was watching Monday night football. So she knew that there was no sense in talking to him and she went into the family room and decided to just kneel and worship the Lord and just continue to seek Him.

As she was there kneeling, suddenly she heard the sound of a rushing wind and she felt, "Oh wonderful!" We had been studying Acts 2 and there was a sound like a mighty rushing wind and they were all filled. So she heard this sound of a rushing wind and she just began to rejoice and by faith received the gift. Then later on she realized the furnace had gone on, but it had triggered her faith. Faith is the key to receiving the gifts of God by believing that He has promised and that He will do what He has promised. And it is not sometime ambiguously in the future, but He will do it now.

Years ago when we were pastoring in Tucson, Arizona, there was a young boy who desired the gift of the Holy Spirit. And there were several of us after the service just waiting upon the Lord and praying. And so, we laid hands on this young boy to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and he began to say, "Daja, Daja, Daja." And I thought--"Daja? What's that?" But this lady who was there also praying with us, came around the circle to me and she said, "Brother Smeeth, Brother Smeeth. He is speaking my language! That is Czechoslovakian for thank you, thank you, thank you." And I thought, "forgive me, Lord." The boy began to speak in Czechoslovakian and she began to tell us the worship and the praises that he was offering to God. It was a glorious experience!

There is that faith, and so often the necessity to have that faith triggered, because the gifts of God are received by faith. When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, he said,

This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:2)

And obviously the answer is they received it by the hearing of faith.

Now many times we do associate it with the works of the law. I have heard people testify to the receiving of the Holy Spirit and they said that they knew the thing that was holding them back from receiving the gift

of the Holy Spirit was that pack of cigarettes in their pocket. They would say, "And the moment I took them out and laid them there before the Lord, then God filled me with the Spirit.

Well again, it is the thing of faith. You see their faith was hindered by their conviction of smoking cigarettes. And they felt that if they would just surrender this to the Lord, then they knew God would fill them. Thus, when they gave that to the Lord their faith was triggered to receive it at that moment. Though this would appear like the works of the law, it was not. "The moment I made a full sacrifice, then God rewarded me." No. The moment you made that commitment that was holding you up mentally from believing and trusting God to give you the gift--the moment you surrendered that--your faith was activated and you accepted the gift.

The Holy Spirit is given to us to make us holy. It is not given to us to give us exciting, exhilarating experiences. You do not have to achieve some degree of holiness to be filled with the Spirit. Many people would intimate that you have to attain or achieve a particular degree of holiness. He will make us holy and He is given to make us holy. But He is given primarily to give us power--power to be witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Now, in all of these things, I realize that we are in extremely controversial territory. So I would like to say that in all of these things, we must remember the supremacy of love.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1)

Having the gift of tongues is not evidence that I am more spiritual than the others around me who have not received the gift. Unfortunately, there are some very mean-spirited, cantankerous people who speak in tongues, thinking that it does manifest some superior spiritual attainment. But nothing could be further from the truth. If the gifts of God in your life do not produce love, then they are totally meaningless.

And if I were to hold to a traditional, fundamentalist position and condemn all of those who speak in tongues as being from the devil, and I have no love for them, my fundamental orthodoxy is a meaningless diatribe. The answer is to walk in love. "Three things that abide: faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love" (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:13).

So if you speak in tongues, enjoy! However, do not despise those who do not understand the gift and do not think of yourself as somehow spiritually superior to them. You are not. If you do not speak in tongues, do not despise those who do, nor attribute that gift of God to Satan. They love our Lord with a great emotional fervency and are as much of the body of Christ as you are.

So let us walk in love. If a person speaks in tongues, fine, as long as he does it within the scriptural context. If a person does not speak in tongues, fine. He can still have a very close, intimate, marvelous, Spirit-filled relationship with God. Tongues is not the issue. The issue is how much love is manifested by the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life. That is the real litmus test of the Holy Spirit--the love that I have. The love that can accept someone who is different from me, but acknowledges and recognizes that Jesus loves us both and has brought us both into His family that we might learn to love one another, even as the Lord loves us.

Father, we thank You for the gifts of Your Holy Spirit. And as we continue, Lord, in the study of these gifts, we pray that You would give to us understanding. But not only understanding, Lord, we desire the gifts.

That the Holy Spirit would divide to each of us severally as He wills. And again, Lord, help us to be open and not close any doors, but be willing and ready, Lord, to receive from You whatever You may desire to bestow upon us. We wait upon You, Lord, and we look to You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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