

TONGUES[†]

Differing views about the gift of tongues have generated more controversy than those regarding any other spiritual gift. The real culprit is legalism, which tries to legislate others' behavior and experiences and stifles the Holy Spirit's creativity. The definition, characteristics, and cautions that follow are valid whether you believe that tongues are for today or believe the gift was only for the early church. There are three varieties of the gift of tongues, which is the Spirit-given ability to speak in a language that you do not know or understand.

- **An unknown foreign language.** Speaking in a foreign language that the speaker does not understand but that others who are present do understand. This happened at Pentecost when the disciples spoke the Gospel in languages they themselves did not understand, but that were the native languages of those attending the celebration in Jerusalem. Consequently, the gospel was heard and understood so that many believed and were saved. *Acts 2:1-12*
- **An unknown spiritual language.** Speaking in a non-intelligible language known only to God. This is used to give a message to the church when God specifically wants it validated via an interpretation given by the one who spoke it or through another believer who has the gift of the interpretation of tongues. This message will instruct, encourage, or discipline believers, and should always be consistent with His Word. *I Corinthians 14:4-19*
- **A prayer language.** Praying with words that only the Holy Spirit can understand. This is not a message to the church that needs interpretation, but rather a way of communicating in a personal way with God. *I Corinthians 14:28* and possibly *Romans 8:26-27*

CHARACTERISTICS

1. An ability to pray for needs even when they do not know what to pray for. *Romans 8:26-27*
2. An openness to the more emotional aspects of worship.
3. An evidence, or witness, of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This was valuable to the early church as evidence of where the Holy Spirit was working.
4. A service to the Body of Christ in communicating something He desires to make known in a supernatural way.

CAUTIONS

1. Over-emphasizing the emotional aspects of walking in Christ. Speaking in tongues can be an exhilarating experience. Emotion is certainly part of the whole person, but it is never meant to be the basis for our relationship with Christ.
2. Using tongues as a measure to judge other people and/or churches with regard to the genuineness of their love and commitment to God.

[†] This gift is not included in the "Finding Your Spiritual Gifts" quiz.

3. Trying to recapture a previous experience that was particularly meaningful instead of focusing on what the Lord is doing now and in the future.
4. Feeling inadequate to pray in regular language, believing that only the Holy Spirit can pray through them in words that cannot be understood.
5. Feeling their gift gives them special status or importance in the Body of Christ.
6. Disrupting services by using the gift in a way that is out of order or that causes confusion.
7. Using a prayer language in a service, thinking it is a message to the church from God.
8. Equating the gift of tongues with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Those who speak in tongues sometimes claim that those who do not do speak in tongues do not experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. This has created dissension and unnecessary division.
9. Counterfeiting the gift in response to peer or pulpit pressure.

INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

This gift, related to the gift of tongues, is the Spirit-given ability to understand what has been spoken in tongues and to make it understandable. In some cases this would be the ability to understand a message given by a speaker that is not in the interpreter's native language. In other cases it would be the ability to understand what is spoken in a heavenly language and make it known.

One common temptation is to make up an interpretation just to be certain a message that has been given in tongues is interpreted. The Bible clearly states that when a tongue is spoken in the church there must be an interpretation. Another temptation is to use opportunities to interpret as a way to emphasize something that the interpreter personally feels strongly about.