

Tongues: Prayer Language Vs. Public Gift

By Rev. Mel C. Montgomery

The most common question, or challenge, I receive from Christians who are unfamiliar with tongues, is to explain the term “prayer language,” and to prove its existence from Scripture. Somewhere in the last two thousand years, someone coined the term “Prayer Language” to differentiate private speaking in tongues from the public gift of speaking in tongues.

That there are two different kinds of tongues, private and public, is clear from the irreconcilable statements Paul writes about tongues.

Paul first writes:

For he [man] that speaketh in an unknown tongues speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him...-I Cor 14:2.

But later in the same chapter Paul also writes:

In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I [God] speak unto this people [men]...-I Cor. 14:21.

In verse two, Paul describes tongues as *man speaking to God*.

In verse 21, Paul describes tongues as *God speaking to man*.

The type of tongues where men speak in prayer and worship to God, and no other man understands him, is what we have come to call the “prayer language.”

Paul left us written instructions in I and II Corinthians directed first to the Church at Corinth and also to us today, clarifying the purpose and identifying the proper way of accommodating speaking in tongues.

Paul told us:

- Paul said that he used his ability to speak in tongues to pray, and to worship God. [verse 15].
- He was thankful to God for the ability to pray and worship God in other tongues [verse 18].
- He found this to be a deeply spiritual and edifying experience [vs. 4].
- Jude agrees with Paul's assessment of the edifying power of praying in tongues [Jude 20].
- Paul urged all of us to speak, pray, and worship God in other tongues, "I would that ye all spake with tongues..." [vs. 5].
- Nowhere does Paul tell us that he ever identified the "other tongue" in which he spoke.
- Nor does he mention that he ever preached a sermon to anyone in other tongues.
- Nowhere does he state that we should try to identify the "other tongue" in which we are speaking, or to attempt to preach sermons to others in it.

But Paul also gave some common sense instructions concerning tongues—the prayer language. For example, if someone were to stand up in the public assembly, and speak out loudly to God for an hour in tongues—the prayer language—such an exercise would be entirely pointless and a waste of time. In exercises of the prayer language, "no man understandeth him." So the congregation would understand not a single word, and be bored to tears.

Have you ever been to a concert where they sang in a language you didn't know? I did recently. I went to a free zydeko—Cajun music—concert. I assumed that this concert would be in English, but was disappointed to find once I got there, that it was to be entirely in French/Cajun. I enjoyed the lively music, but after two minutes, my attention wandered because I didn't understand a word of what was being sung. By the end of an hour, I ranged from being nearly asleep, to almost climbing the walls and wondering when this concert would *ever* end.

Such would be the same reaction from people forced to sit and listen to uninterpreted tongues for an hour. Paul pointed out an example like this, and said that in Church he would rather speak 5 words that everyone could understand than 10,000 words in uninterpreted tongues that no one could benefit from. Referring back to the French concert I attended, I would have to say the same. I would rather go to a concert where they sang five words I understood, than ten thousand words I couldn't make heads or tails out of.

So Paul gave the common sense instruction, that if someone felt they had something to say in other tongues to the entire congregation, let him do so. However, if he speaks for awhile, and no one seems to be able to interpret what is

being said, then for Heaven's sake [my words not his] have the poor brother sit back down, "and let him speak to himself, and to God," and don't have him bore everyone to tears. [vs. 28]. Note that Paul said, "...let him speak to himself, and to God," thus explaining that such a manifestation is simply the person speaking in the prayer language "to God," and not the full Gift of Tongues in which God speaks to men.

It is at this point in the narrative where we begin to see tongues used for something other than prayer and praise. When there is something to be said to the entire congregation in other tongues, this is not a manifestation of the prayer language. In prayer man speaks to God. And there is no need to interpret for the public the contents of our private prayers to God. If it is a public manifestation of tongues, then it is a manifestation of the actual Gift of Tongues—one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Chapter 12.

In the case where the Gift of Tongues is manifested, the contents of the message will be a message from God to men [vs. 21]. In an instance of a message through the Gift of Tongues—from God to the congregation—Paul directed that such messages in tongues were to be allowed and accommodated in a public service, but the Holy Spirit directed him to set reasonable boundaries within which we are to stay. Namely, realizing that it is possible that several people may simultaneously feel they have a message in tongues for the congregation, he limited the number of individuals allowed to participate to "two or at the most by three," [vs. 27]. Paul added that one person should interpret [vs. 27]. The rules he laid down, like all of the instructions given in God's Word, make perfect sense, and keep a service from getting off the track.

All Charismatics—currently numbering 537 Million Christians—have experienced the prayer language of speaking in tongues.

All born-again Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. However, there is a secondary experience that not all Christians have received. Indeed, many do not know that there even is another experience from God to be received.

Jesus called this experience that is to be received subsequent to [after] salvation, being "baptized with the Holy Ghost." Acts 1:5. He called it the receiving of power, "...ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come **upon** you..." Acts 1:8. Note that He said "upon you" not "in you." The believer in Christ already has the Holy Spirit within them. But the Lord desires for the presence of His Spirit to be **within** us, but also that the power of His Spirit be **upon** us.

As it was in the days of the Bible, so is it still true today: When the Holy Spirit fell upon the born-again Christians back in Bible times, they received the ability to speak or pray in other tongues. Acts 2:3, 4; 10:46; 19:6. Likewise today, when the Holy Spirit's power falls upon a born-again Christian, the believer immediately receives the ability to speak or pray in other tongues. All Charismatic Christians have experienced this prayer language. Far fewer have ever experienced the full Gift

of Tongues enabling them to speak a message in tongues to a congregation that was then interpreted into English.

Concerning many Christians receiving the prayer language of tongues but very few receiving the Gift of Tongues that is to be exercised by giving and interpreting messages in public services, Kenneth Hagin Sr. made an interesting comment. Drawing from his own experience in 60 years of ministry, he reported that by the early 1950's he had laid hands on over 10,000 people and personally heard them speak in tongues. But out of them all, he noted that only two received the full Gift of speaking in diverse tongues, who then went ahead giving messages publicly in their local congregation. The other 9,998 received simply the prayer language, and continued to pray and worship with it.

There is a considerable difference both in Scripture and in experience between tongues—the personal prayer language, and tongues—the public Gift. In my case, my pastor laid his hands on me and prayed for me to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. I began to speak in tongues. I prayed in tongues, and worshipped God in other tongues. I never understood a single word of what I was speaking. Paul didn't either. I Cor. 14:2, 14. But not understanding what was being said in other tongues did not stop Paul or me from going ahead and praying in tongues and worshipping God in tongues. But this was all a private exercise of this ability. I never once was led to stand up in the congregation and speak out a message in tongues. I had received the prayer language, but not the full Gift of Diverse Kinds of Tongues.

Eight years later, I was preparing to leave [Sister Goodwin's](#) house. Alternate link: <http://brothermel.com/thegoodwinsandme.aspx>. She had been used for 60 years in speaking public messages in tongues and in interpreting them. She laid her hands on me, and prayed for God to use me in the Gifts of His Holy Spirit. I felt nothing imparted to me at that moment. But a few weeks later, the Gift of Speaking in tongues suddenly began to flow through me. I would feel an urging rise up within me to speak in tongues. I would speak out under that urging for a few moments, and when the urging or the “unction” subsided, the English words of interpretation would arise within me, and I would speak out the interpretation. Since then, over the last 17 years, I've spoken hundreds of messages in tongues publicly, maybe more, and have interpreted just as many.

I can speak at will in my prayer language to God in prayer and worship, as can any other Charismatic. However, I cannot speak messages in tongues in public at will. Nor can I interpret messages in tongues at will. Speaking and interpreting in public is a manifestation of the two full-fledged Gifts of tongues and interpretation. Those Gifts operate only as the Holy Spirit wills. I Cor. 12:11.

I have ministered the baptism in the Holy Spirit to a number of born-again Christians over the years. All received the prayer language, meaning the ability to speak, pray, and worship in other tongues at will. None yet have received the full Gift of Speaking in Tongues. None have given public messages in tongues. Yet there have been a number of times in which believers who pray in tongues but have never

spoken a public message in tongues that was interpreted have suddenly begun manifesting the gift of tongues as they heard me teaching on spiritual gifts. As I taught, God imparted the Gift of Tongues to believers who had already prayed in tongues for years. To God be the glory for the great things He has done.

Refuting Counter-Arguments

I have read every imaginable counter argument which tries to argue against there being two kinds or manifestations of tongues—private prayer, and public Gift. I haven't found one yet that takes into account all of the words of Christ, all of the examples in the Book of Acts, and all of the instructions Paul gave us.

One common argument is that all manifestations of speaking in tongues are those of men speaking in prayer to God. That argument is silent though concerning I Cor. 14:21 which says, "With men of other tongues and other lips **will I speak** unto this people." If tongues is always men speaking unto God, then surely God is not going to pray a prayer to Himself!

Others try to explain away this Scripture by claiming that it refers to a person standing up in a public assembly, praying to God in other tongues, and then someone else interpreting the prayer back to the congregation in the local language. But what possible purpose would there be in interpreting someone's private prayers for the public to listen to? For that matter, why pray in tongues and have it interpreted into the language of the congregation? Why not just pray in the language everyone knows?

Any way you care to look at it, you have to admit that Paul indicated two different functions of speaking in tongues:

- Prayer from man to God.
- And messages from God to man.
- When man prays to God in tongues, "no man understandeth him."
- When God speaks to man through other tongues, no man will necessarily understand the tongue, unless God simultaneously gives the interpretation to another.
- This same pattern of private prayer and public Gift is demonstrated in the New Testament, throughout the Early Church, resurfacing again and again during revivals over the course of centuries of Church History, and continuing among the 537 million born-again Christians who currently speak in tongues.

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About the Author

The ministry of author, reformer, lecturer, entrepreneur, and revivalist preacher, Mel Montgomery is an example of God fulfilling a word of prophecy.

Mel was mentored in ministry by Sister Goodwin. She and her late husband, the Rev. J.R. Goodwin had sat in meetings conducted by Smith Wigglesworth, Raymond T. Richey, and other early Pentecostals. Then God had used the Goodwins as a bridge to the leaders of the Word of Faith move. The Goodwins taught John Osteen and Kenneth Hagin Sr. about the gifts of the Spirit. Kenneth Hagin patterned his prophetic ministry after the spiritual flow he had witnessed in the Goodwins.

Before her passing, Sister Goodwin laid her hands on Mel, asked God to use him in spiritual gifts, and prophesied that Mel would have “a strong ministry, and an anointed ministry, like *some of the men of old.*” Years after Sister Goodwin’s passing, the Goodwin descendants and others asked Mel to host on his website rare audio recordings of early Pentecostal preachers that were recorded at the Goodwins’ church and elsewhere. Mel uploaded the recordings to his website, www.brothermel.com, making these treasures available to the world by download, for free.

Mel’s message and concept of ministry began to change as he listened to the recordings of the “men of old” like Howard Carter, Stanley Frodsham, F.F. Bosworth, the Goodwins, and others. He discovered that what the Pentecostal giants preached bears little resemblance to the extreme teachings common today in the Charismatic and Word of Faith branch of Christianity to which he belongs. Sister Goodwin’s prophecy is fulfilled as Mel continues to speak in churches, preaching as did the “men of old,” the transforming power of the Cross and Pentecost. He authors articles and e-books, identifying which of our teachings are biblical and which ones are not. Brother Mel calls for a Reformation in Charismatic and Word of Faith circles.

Mel’s teachings have been well received, with some being translated and published in foreign countries. In 2007 and 2008, Mel’s website received over 723,000 hits from people in 78 countries. Mel’s monthly e-mail newsletter currently goes out to subscribers around the world.

