

Kaleo Church: The Gift of Tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14

Observations on the gift of tongues in Paul's day that many Cessationists and Continuationists can agree on:

1. In Acts 2 the gift of tongues was the ability to speak in real human languages unknown by the speaker, yet they were clearly understood by those in the crowd who naturally knew those languages. (Acts 2:6, 11).
2. The Corinthians were misusing the gift of tongues in the gathering to show off how spiritual they were. (I Cor 12-14).
3. Even though they were misusing it, Paul believed that the gift of tongues was a real Spiritual gift that some of the Corinthians had been given, but not all of them (I Cor. 12:10-11, 30).
4. The gift of tongues should not be confused with Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Paul says that all true believers have been baptized in the Holy Spirit, but not all speak in tongues. (I Cor. 12:13, 30).
5. Love and not tongues was the gift that Paul wanted all of the Corinthians to prioritize. (I Cor. 13).
6. The one who speaks in tongues is speaking to God and not to people. (I Cor. 14:2-4, 14-16, 28).
7. Paul does not expect anyone in Corinth, including the person speaking in tongues, to understand what is said unless someone is given the spiritual gift of interpretation (I Cor. 14:2, 13).
8. Uninterpreted tongues may edify the speaker (14:4), but no one else can be edified by them if they don't understand what is being said (I Cor. 14:5-12, 17).
9. Instead of edifying fellow Christians, speaking in tongues can make them feel like outsiders because they don't understand what is being said. (I Cor. 14:16-17).
10. Speaking in tongues can also make any non-Christians visiting think that you are crazy (I Cor. 14:23).
11. Paul makes it clear in I Cor. 14:27-28 that there are to be no uninterpreted tongues in the gathering. If someone does speak in tongues it needs to be interpreted and limited to three people. If there is no interpreter, they must remain silent.
12. The person speaking in tongues remains in control of their faculties, which is why they are able to be silent if there is no interpreter. (I Cor. 14:28).
13. Paul seems to have no intention of ever speaking in tongues in a service (I Cor. 14:19, also vs 6).
14. However, Paul does speak in tongues more than anyone else in Corinth (I Cor. 14:18). This seems to imply that Paul used tongues in his private devotions since we never hear of him using tongues in any public setting; yet, he says he uses them more than anyone else.

A Key Question:

How can someone be edified by praying privately in tongues if they don't know what they are saying? Or put another way, in I Cor 14:14 Paul writes, "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful?" How can someone be edified if their mind is unfruitful? (Romans 8:26-27, Groanings, Silence, Tongues...)

Is the Gift of Tongues for Today?

Key Issue	Is the New Testament gift of tongues always the gift of speaking in other human languages ?
Agreements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The gift of tongues in Acts 2 is clearly the gift of speaking in another human language. 2. What people call the gift of tongues today is not primarily speaking in another human language.
Cessationist Argument	The gift of tongues in Acts 2 is clearly the gift of speaking in real human languages. Without any clear indication that the gift has changed, we ought to assume that the gift always deals with speaking in real human languages. Therefore, if what is being practiced today is not speaking in a human language unknown to the speaker, then what is being practiced is not the New Testament gift of tongues.
Continuationist Argument	<p>While the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is clearly the gift of speaking in another human language, the gift of tongues in I Corinthians 12-14 seems to be different. In 12:10 Paul speaks of various kinds of tongues, meaning not different human languages, but different species of tongues, including both human and heavenly/angelic languages.</p> <p>The difference between the gift in Acts and in Corinth is seen in the fact that in Corinth, Paul does not expect anyone to be able to understand what is said, even though Corinth was a port city with people from all around the world. Instead, Paul assumes the need for the spiritual gift of interpretation which wasn't necessary in Acts 2. It seems plausible that one kind of tongue might be some sort of heavenly language based on the purpose of the gift (to speak to God), its primary use being devotional (Paul uses it more than anyone else, but never in public), and the necessity of a spiritual gift to interpret it.</p>
Common Ground	One thing that is clear from this passage is that you do not have to be a cessationists to fight against the abuses and misuses of the Spiritual gifts. Paul clearly believed that the gifts were still in effect in his day, and yet he adamantly fought against their misuse and abuse in the church in Corinth. All of us should be unified against the misuse and abuse of this gift.
A Call to Unity	Amidst our differences, the unity of the Spirit that Jesus bought for us with his precious blood is far greater than minor differences in the outworking of a specific gift of the Spirit. We are a blood-bought family and must be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of the peace that Jesus purchased for us on the cross.

Applications:

1. We will not allow differences in our views on tongues to make a brother or sister on either side of the issue feel like an outsider. (I Cor. 14:16-17).
2. Tongues will not be the gift that we pursue as a sign of our spiritual maturity. Love will be that gift and we will seek to love each other across our differences (I Cor. 13-14:1).