

The Gift of Interpretation of Tongues

By The Most Reverend Philip Edward Phlegar Weeks

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(This is the tenth in a series on the charismata and the Holy Spirit)

Probably less is taught regarding the Interpretation of Tongues than any of the other eight manifestations listed by St Paul in First Corinthians chapter twelve. Yet he had much to say about this gift in chapter fourteen and required it when a message was spoken in an unfamiliar language. Make now the distinction between a message spoken in an open meeting and tongues used as a prayer language. The latter does not require interpretation although sometime it may be interpreted.

Such was a case when Dennis Bennett was praying for a woman at the altar rail of his Ballard WA church many years ago. The woman next to the person with whom he was praying later told Father Bennett that he was speaking in the Japanese language, and she told him what he said because she knew the language. Another incident occurred when my wife was praying for a young lady who came to our prayer group and would not tell us her reason why asking for prayer. Along with several others June prayed with her, and was praying in tongues. The girl suddenly grabbed June and said, "how did you know?". She explained to June that she prayed in fluent Spanish and June was saying to God the very problem the girl was trying to keep secret from the people. June does not speak Spanish. These are situations of translation, or they may also be the gift of interpretation only that the hearer heard the words in "their own language".

I cite these as examples of what might have been on the Day of Pentecost. Inside the building the believers baptized in the Holy Spirit praised God in languages they did not know or learn, but on the street outside people heard this praise voiced in "their own language".

The Interpretation of Tongues as St Paul is writing about is more than a translation. The interpretation is as much of a supernatural occurrence as is the speaking in a language not learned by the speaker. In my book "*God Is My Buddy And Other Charismatic Misnomers*" I tell the story of an African visitor to an American prayer meeting. In the group was a lady whose prayer language was a clicking sound. She was always embarrassed by this and prayed often for the Holy Spirit to give her syllables like the others. The

night the African visited, the group spent a time in prayer and the heavenly language was part of the prayer time. When they finished praying the African jumped to his feet and ask, "who did that: who said that?" "Did what?" the leader asked. "Who made that clicking sound?" The poor lady was embarrassed as the others pointed to her. "That is the sound my tribe makes", he said, "when the King is passing by!" King Jesus! The "unknown tongue" spoken may be an actual language spoken somewhere in the world among the more than four thousand languages and dialects known to man. Although it may be an unknown language, the person who speaks in the vernacular the message spoken in tongues is given the gift of interpretation; making known to the listeners what the Holy Spirit is saying. Giving the message first in tongues may be His way of getting our attention so we will hear what He wants us to hear.

I was in a weekend mission in an Episcopal Church in South Carolina, and during the course of my teaching one of the women surprised me with a message in tongues. It came as a surprise to the people also because although I was teaching about the Holy Spirit, they were not accustomed to the operation of the gifts. I paused and waited for the interpretation. After a few minutes a man said "the Lord is telling us ...". When he finished I asked the people if that interpretation had any significance to them. It did. They were in a decision making time regarding a matter in their church and could not reach an agreement. If the man had said what he did they admitted the likelihood would have been to ignore his opinion, but spoken first in tongues, it got their attention and they were more willing to listen to the directive of the Lord which they had been resisting.

There are several ways in which *glossolalia* (the phenomenon of speaking in an unlearned language) is used. One is a prayer language in which the individual is praying to God as the Holy Spirit assists him (Romans 8:26) and this does not require interpretation. This also applies when in worship people sing in the Spirit, although at a Camps Farthest Out I heard a woman sing in the Spirit and a man sang the interpretation in the same melody. This form of prayer may also be used in ministry to another person; again not requiring interpretation because it is between the individual and God. In battle with evil spirits this form of prayer may be employed in exorcism, and again does not require interpretation. However, when a message is spoken in a gathering of people, St Paul says it needs interpretation otherwise the people will not know what God is saying to them. The interpretation may be a translation if a person in the group is knowledgeable of the language such

as in June's situation of praying with the young lady, or the interpretation in the vernacular may be totally unrelated to the *glossolalia* spoken, but as much a phenomenon the speaking in an unlearned language may be, equally a phenomenon when one is able to speak clearly the message God is giving His people.

Although St Paul listed this manifestation specifically in reference to speaking in tongues, the gift of interpretation may also apply to the interpretation of dreams and visions.