

# Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues

by G.W. North

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of personal experience in understanding spiritual gifts and the dangers of speaking dogmatically about them without such experience.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 12:4

**Topics:** "Spiritual Gifts", "Authority in Experience"

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## Description

G.W. North addresses the gifts of Prophecy, Tongues, and Interpretation of Tongues, emphasizing the importance of personal experience in understanding and discussing these spiritual gifts. He warns against the arrogance of those who presume to judge or explain spiritual matters without having experienced them firsthand, highlighting that true authority comes from lived experience rather than mere academic knowledge. North encourages a humble and reverent approach to spiritual inquiry, cautioning against preconceived notions that can lead to misunderstanding and rejection of these gifts. He illustrates his points by comparing the knowledge of spiritual gifts to the understanding of complex medical conditions, asserting that one cannot truly know a gift of the Spirit without experiencing it. Ultimately, he calls for a recognition of the spiritual nature of these gifts and a rejection of any attitude that diminishes their significance.

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## Transcript

Leaving our study of this second group of gifts, we complete our examination of the nine by examining the last three that Paul mentions here, namely Prophecy, Tongues and Interpretation of tongues. But before doing so in any categorical manner as above, it may be well at this point to attempt to dispel some errors which have arisen over the years as a result of misunderstanding, and also to dispose of the mistaken notion that man has an inalienable right, as though he were God, to pronounce his judgements upon God's ways.

It is quite impossible to understand the divine mind and become God's tutor or mentor. Carnal intellect cannot in any degree grasp spiritual truth. This is not to say that men should not make enquiries about many baffling things spoken of in the Bible; on the contrary this is exactly what they should do. But always their approach should be with reverent humility, and their search conducted in meekness, having first accepted both the genuineness of the fact, and also the good and useful purpose of the thing(s) about

which they ask. Instead of doing this however, quite unwarrantably in respect of these particular gifts, so many of men's investigations are conducted upon the basis of preconceived ideas, and in the spirit of rejection. Upon enquiry it is regrettably discovered that quite often many who discuss or write about this trio either do not possess them and / or have no personal experience of their proper function.

Surely it ought to be clearly understood among us that whatever the spiritual point men may debate or argue, no-one is in a position to speak with correctness or expound with authority upon it unless he himself has a living experience of it. Too often a matter is examined theologically or from an academic viewpoint, which totally rejects certain portions of scripture incompatible with a particular interpretation. The result is that with no experience of the truth being examined, people say 'it cannot be', or, with some other equally unfair remark, cloud the issue and shirk moral responsibility. That the Bible refers to a matter and a man may collate all the relevant facts both in and out of scripture about it, is not sufficient grounds for any man to make dogmatic pronouncements about it. By God's estimate he is still in ignorance of the matter.

#### We Speak that we do Know

As an illustration of this simple fact, we need only refer to the hundreds of theories of and interpretations about prophetic scriptures concerning times and events to do with the second coming of the Lord Jesus. These have been heaped up and handed on over centuries and perhaps multiplied by the modern Church, but although they are so time-honoured, the Church has had to reject many of them, and rightly so. The simple reason for all this confusion of thought is that no-one has yet experienced the Second Coming. However, after the Lord has returned for His Church and we are all gathered home, every one of us will know the exact details and be authorities upon the event; by which we see that it is experience which makes a man an authoritative commentator.

No born-again child of God doubts the scriptures that speak of the Second Coming; instead he refers with joy to the certainty of it. But that is an entirely different thing from presuming to speak as though he knows with absolute certainty all about the actual fulfilment of it. If he should do so, no-one except those who indulge in fantasies would give him credence. This being so, why should a man be given credence if he presumes to speak dogmatically about a gift of the Spirit of which he has no personal functional experience?

This question may be quite correctly answered by saying that the illustration does not present a true analogy, for there is no present demonstration of the Second Coming in the Church, but that there is a present demonstration of these gifts (say of tongues for example) in the churches today. But is it not also true that there is a present demonstration of the dreaded disease of cancer in the world today; and does the most highly-trained scientist, whether he be pathologist or surgeon, believe that because he is a specialist he knows cancer? He certainly does not unless he has cancer. And is a victim of the dreaded disease discredited because he does not know all the theories about it? The specialist may with some precision speak about the correct ways to try to alleviate the condition, cut it out, burn it up, contain it, or whatever other treatment it may require, but he knows nothing of it within himself: in that realm he is thankfully ignorant.

Lamentably, ignorance in the realm of experience of Tongues is often similarly, perhaps cynically, regarded among some as a thing to be thankful for. Reprehensible as such an attitude is, worse than this, Paul's guidance is presumably regarded as knowledge enough upon which to attempt a campaign aimed

at total elimination of the gift. We do not accept such illogical procedure on the part of scientists. Indeed they would not think of speaking and acting so senselessly; then why in the name of common sense should we accept such unethical behaviour on the part of Christians? As Jesus says, 'the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light'.

No child of God's regeneration ought to act or speak as though any gift of the Spirit is other than entirely spiritual. Even though he may know nothing of its working in personal experience, he should bear in mind the righteous principle underlying the apostle's words in another context, 'every creature of God is good and nothing to be refused.'

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/gw-north/prophecy-tongues-and-interpretation-of-tongues/>

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