

The word “*tongues*” (*glossa*) is used several times in the New Testament as well as secular Greek. Here in 1 Cor. 12:10 this term is used twice. In some verses *tongue* describes the organ man uses to speak (Mk. 7:33, 35; Lk. 1:64; Acts 2:26; Rom. 3:13; 14:11; 1 Cor. 14:9; Phil. 2:11; Jas. 1:26; 3:5-6, 8; 1 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:10). *Tongue* also describes life in the Hadean world (Lk. 16:24) and what took place on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 2:3). See, too, how it is used in 1 Jn. 3:18. The book of Revelation often associates the word *tongue* with different ethnic groups and human speech that can be understood (see Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).

In other parts of the New Testament the word *tongue* refers to the “tongue speaking” described here in 1 Cor. 12:10. For other verses that refer to this supernatural gift, see Mk. 16:17; Acts 2:4, 11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 13:1, 8; 14:2, 4-6, 13-14, 18-19, 22-23, 26-27.

*Tongue speaking* comes from the word “*glossolalia*” (*glossa* is the word for *tongue* and *lalia* is the word for *talking* or *speaking*). This gift, which is more fully described in the following paragraphs, the commentary on 10c, the *special study on tongue speaking* located just prior to the introductory commentary on 1 Cor. 13, and in the commentary on 14:2, allowed Christians to *speak* in languages they had never learned, plus *understand* languages they had never studied. The Corinthians prized this ability, but Paul deemphasized this gift. Here in verses 8-10 Paul placed all the other listed spiritual gifts above tongue speaking and interpreting tongues. In chapter 14 he showed the uselessness of tongues (speaking in a foreign language) if people did not understand what was being said (compare 14:19).

Because Corinth was a type of “commercial crossroads” (people from many different places came to this city), the gift of tongues was a potentially very useful gift for the Corinthians. These Christians should have used the gift of tongues to communicate the gospel to the “foreigners” they met, but they abused this ability, just as they abused the fellowship meals described in chapter 11. Much of what is said in 1 Cor. 14 is also related to the Corinthians’ abuse of tongues.

God not only gave the first Christians the “great commission” (Mk. 16:15), He gave them the gift of tongues (the ability to speak in human languages they had never learned) to help them “go into all the world and preach the gospel” (Mk. 16:17, 20). Tongues allowed Christians to fully and instantly communicate with all kinds of people, some of whom were probably Persians, Scythians, Romans, Egyptians, Hebrews, etc. Today Christians are still under obligation to carry the gospel to every place, but now they either learn the needed foreign language(s) or use translators.

The expression “*divers kinds*” (*genos*) is also found in verse 28; in each of these verses this word has “the sense of ‘kind’ or ‘species’” (Kittel, 1:685). This term is one of several proofs that *tongues* were known languages and dialects, not unknown sounds or gibberish (this point is more fully developed in the commentary on 14:2). An example of *different tongues* is found in Acts 2. The apostles were able to instantly speak foreign languages and dialects (Acts 2:4, 7) as well as understand what the “foreigners” were saying (Acts 2:37). When people accused the apostles of being intoxicated (Acts 2:13), Peter knew what was being said (Acts 2:14-15). This point is also illustrated by Acts 2:42. Were not some of the “foreigners” described in Acts 2:8-12 part of the group that continued to receive instruction in the “apostle’s doctrine”? The gift of tongues

allowed Christians to fully and fluently communicate with anyone who spoke a different language or dialect.

Gromacki (*The Modern Tongues Movement*, p. 62) noted how the word *kinds* (*genos*) “refers to a family, offspring, race, nation, kind, sort, and class in New Testament usage. It always depicts that which is related to each other. There are many ‘kinds’ of fish (Matt. 13:47), but they are all fish. There are several ‘kinds’ of demons in the world (Matt. 17:21), but they are all still demons. There are many ‘kinds’ of voices (1 Cor. 14:10), but they are all voices. From this it can be concluded that there are many ‘kinds’ of languages, but they are all languages. They are several families of languages in the world—Semitic, Slavic, Latin, etc. These are all related in that they have a definite vocabulary and grammatical construction. Paul could not have possibly combined known, foreign languages with unknown, ecstatic utterances under the same classification. They simply are not related to each other.”

There have been many investigations into the claims of modern “tongue speaking” and a good summary of the conclusions is expressed in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6:597): “The evidence from modern glossolalists (tongue speakers, BP) that their speech is real language, finally, is spurious. Careful linguistic study has demonstrated that glossolalia is not a ‘real but unknown’ language, but rather ‘language-like’ in its patterning of sounds.”