

What is “Speaking in Tongues?”

By Melanie Stone

I had been raised in church, but wasn't until I was about seventeen that I first heard someone praying in tongues. A friend of my mother's had come over to pray with her. When I walked in the room they asked me to join them. I had never been taught about speaking in tongues. I didn't know it was in the Bible. I never knew that it existed. When my mother's friend started to pray in tongues, to be honest, I was a little freaked out. I thought it was weird. I thought it was wrong. My first instinct was to protect my mother and separate her from her strange friend, but the ladies told me that what they were doing was in the Bible. They showed me scriptures that no one had ever shown me before. I left curious, but not interested. Later a friend of mine began to take me to youth groups that believed the same way, and I started to ask questions. I started to look to God for answers. It was then that I began to learn about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Needless to say, High School was never the same. I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and experienced the power of God in my life. I was having encounters with the God of the Universe, and nothing else could compare to it. I'm sure some of my friends thought I was a little strange, but I knew that what I was living was real. It was incredible! I found the Bible had quite a lot to say about speaking in tongues. It also is referred to as praying in the spirit.

The first account of speaking in tongues in the Bible is on the Day of Pentecost when Jesus first sent the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:1-4 “When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2) And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3) Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them 4) and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Speaking in tongues is speaking from your spirit in unknown languages by the enabling of the Holy Spirit. According to I Corinthians 13:1, the languages that are spoken are various languages of humans and of angels. Why would God have us to speak something that we didn't understand? For exactly that reason – it goes beyond the limits of our intellect. It's not just a physical activity; it's a spiritual action.

If you are anything like me, you may question speaking in tongues. Is it real? Is it of God? Is it for today? A friend showed me this scripture in I Corinthians 2:14, “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” He encouraged me to give attention to my heart, or my spirit, not just my head. I found out that learning about spiritual matters required more than a mental understanding; it involved having a spiritual experience.

WHO DOES THE SPEAKING?

It's not the Holy Spirit that does the speaking- it's you. Don't wait for the Holy Spirit to move your mouth for you, because He won't make you do anything. He will give you the help you need as you yield to Him and start speaking.

Acts 2:4 "And THEY were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave THEM utterance."

Speaking in tongues comes from your spirit, not your head. It doesn't come from trying to form words that you've thought up. You simply yield to what comes from your heart, and speak it out of your mouth. The Holy Spirit will never come upon you to make you speak in tongues, but He is always available for you to yield yourself to Him in prayer.

WHO ARE WE TALKING TO?

The Bible is very clear that when we are speaking in tongues, we are speaking to God- not to the devil, not to another person, but to God. You are praying from your heart to God's heart. We may not understand a word of what we're saying, but God hears and understands it ALL.

1 Corinthians 14:2 "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to GOD, for no one understand him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries."

THE PERSONAL USE OF TONGUES

One difficulty people have had in understanding what the Bible says about tongues is not discerning between the **personal** and the **public** use of tongues. The personal use of speaking in tongues has a different purpose than the public use of tongues. We sometimes refer to the personal use of tongues as "praying in the spirit" or using our "prayer language."

The **personal** use of tongues is for every believer. When someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, they receive the ability to speak in tongues. If a person does not speak in tongues immediately, it doesn't mean that they haven't received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says that when we pray, we should believe that we have received. There are several reasons why God wants you to have this gift of the Holy Spirit and the ability to pray in unknown languages.

Help to Grow Spiritually

One purpose for praying in the spirit is to edify yourself spiritually. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:4, "*He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...*" To edify means to build up or strengthen. To make my physical body stronger, I feed it the proper nutritional foods and exercise. It is also important to build myself up spiritually. One way I can strengthen myself spiritually is to pray in tongues. Reading the Bible, worshipping, and going to church are other ways of feeding myself spiritually. If I didn't edify my spirit, my spiritual condition would become weaker.

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Another scripture describing the edification of the personal use of tongues is *Jude 20*...*"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."* When you are stronger in your spirit, you will rise above circumstances, you will have control over your emotions, and temptations won't have a hold on you! It is important to build ourselves up spiritually. In fact, if you are ever in a bind on a big decision or a work problem and you don't know what to do – pray in the spirit. God will lead you by your spirit, and speaking in tongues will make you more sensitive to that leading within you.

Help to Pray

A second purpose for praying in tongues is to receive the Holy Spirit's help in prayer and in declaration. When we pray in the power of the Spirit, we are not limited by our understanding. The Holy Spirit can take us beyond what we know to pray out and say out the things that are God's thoughts and desires.

Romans 8:26, 27 describes praying with the Holy Spirit, "...the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

The Holy Spirit helps us when we simply don't know what to do or how to pray. The Bible says we are praying mysteries, things that we don't know with our mind, but God knows!

I Corinthians 14:2 "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks MYSTERIES."

Sometimes God will reveal to me what I have prayed for others, or myself and sometimes I don't need to know. What I do know is that the Bible tells me that I can trust the Holy Spirit to help me to pray from the spirit, not just from my head.

Help to Worship

A third purpose for praying in tongues is that the Holy Spirit helps you to praise the Lord.

I Corinthians 14:15 reads, "...I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will SING with the SPIRIT, and I will also sing with the understanding."

So many times I reach a point in worship where I don't have the words to express what is in my heart toward the Father. So I begin to sing in tongues. I sense a release in my spirit as I yield to the Holy Spirit and sing in an unknown language. This is a beautiful and powerful experience! Singing in the spirit can also be done publicly when the congregation participates as a whole. There have been times in my personal prayer life when the Holy Spirit will give specific songs, then reveal the words in English so I can sing it with my understanding. Many times the song is what I've needed for the moment, the words lifting Him as Lord over my situation or a prophetic song as a word from God to me.

THE PUBLIC USE OF TONGUES

A message from God

The public use of tongues is when someone stands up in a church assembly and speaks in a tongue for everyone to hear (I Corinthians 14:4, 5). The public use of tongues is always followed by the interpretation as a message from God to His church. If someone were to stand up in an assembly and speak in an unknown language without an interpretation, what good would it do if no one could understand what had been said? Similar to speaking a message in tongues, I've also seen people publicly sing a message in tongues then sing the interpretation. The Lord ministered to the people, and we were blessed!

A sign to the unbeliever

Another purpose for the public use of tongues is for a sign to the unbeliever (I Corinthians 14:22-25.) Being able to speak a language that you've never learned is a supernatural thing. When an unbeliever hears it, and their heart is revealed, they know it has to be God.

HOW TO RECEIVE

To receive the ability to speak in tongues, or pray in the spirit, ask the Lord to fill you with the Holy Spirit (See "Holy Spirit Baptism" on www.growchurches.com). Then open up your heart to be led by the Holy Spirit to speak out with words that He gives to you. Pray from your spirit, the core of your being, and experience the flow of the supernatural power of God!

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