

Praying in Tongues

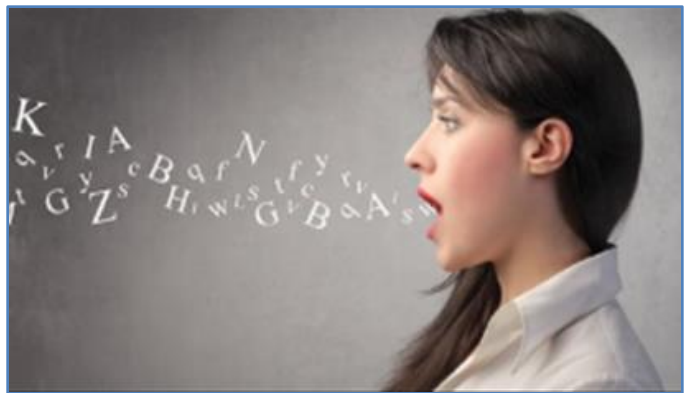
A New Life in the Spirit's Power

Do you have to? No, but you can if you want to and you just may want to. Paul did. In fact he was glad that he prayed in tongues more than the people to whom his letters were addressed. Since he also wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else, he ought to know why something this "scandalous" is so secretly good!

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Corinthians 14:18 ESV

How It Began

It is worth remembering that the gift of tongues came as a complete surprise. No one in the Upper Room was seeking tongues: they were all seeking power. Just ten days earlier they had been commanded by Jesus to stay in Jerusalem and pray for "power from on high" that would help them spread the good news of His resurrection and do the supernatural works He had done. Apparently, Jesus didn't consider that being born again and receiving the indwelling Spirit (from Him personally!) was sufficient for completing anyone's assignment under the New Covenant. So there they were, "gathered in one place" in prayer and expectancy for the arrival of something Jesus wanted them to have.



What came was the "[the baptism of the Holy Spirit](#)." The first outward sign of this empowering experience was the sound of a "mighty rushing wind"; next came

"divided tongues as of fire" resting above each one; then came what we call the private prayer language. These devoted men and women had begun by praying in their native language, but when the baptism of the Spirit occurred their prayers and praises shifted into languages they had never spoken before. Since there was no need for an interpretation—this was a private meeting of disciples—they simply praised God with these new languages out of the abundance of emotion welling up within them, evidently trusting the Lord to understand the content of their speech.

Then the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:1-4 ESV

What then ensued was offense and controversy. It has surrounded and hounded the practice of tongues ever since. The exuberant, exhilarated, ecstatic gathering got noisy! On festival days Jerusalem was packed with people from all over the Mediterranean basin. It didn't take long to



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draw a multitude of “amazed and astonished” onlookers. No doubt some sensed the spiritual nature of what was taking place; others mocked, deriding them for being drunk on “new wine.” That was a very interesting observation in light of Jesus’ comparison of His ministry to new wine, but it wasn’t intended as a compliment to either Jesus or His disciples! When confronted with strange and “bewildering” occurrences some are intrigued; others are frightened. This division continues into our own day.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ...we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." Acts 2:5-8, 11-13 ESV

Peter took good advantage of the situation and steered the people’s attention to the Hebrew Scripture prophecy where power such as this was promised to be given in the “latter days”—days which had now arrived along with the astounding signs. Peter spoke to shift their focus from the sign which was offending them to the salvation Jesus offers and the baptism of power they, too, could receive. He was the first, but certainly not the last, Pentecostal preacher to try to get people to look past the offense of tongues to see the gift in a wider, more inviting, context. Following in his footsteps, we now turn to examine the private prayer language in the wider context of many scriptures.

Is It Necessary?

Tongues are not necessary for getting anyone to heaven. For that you must be born again through faith alone in Christ alone. If that is all you are looking for, then you needn’t look any further. But Jesus would want you to. Remember, it was the Lord who commanded His first believers to seek the baptism of power. When they received it, tongues came with it. Are tongues, therefore, necessary for receiving the baptism in the Spirit? That’s putting the question the wrong way around. Tongues are a sign that the baptism in the Spirit has been received. It certainly operated in that way for the leaders of the Early Church who expected this sign to come forth when they prayed for the Spirit baptism.

Peter saw the sign of tongues falling on Cornelius’ household as he preached to them which indicated to him that they had received the Holy Spirit. Incidentally, Peter also learned from this experience that water baptism doesn’t have to come first. In this instance faith-conversion and Holy Spirit baptism occurred together.

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days. Acts 10:44-48 ESV



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When Paul came across twelve believers in Greece who had not “received the Holy Spirit,” he prayed for them and they began speaking in tongues. This was evidence enough that they had received the same baptism of power as the disciples at Pentecost.

And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ...On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. Acts 19:2, 5-6 ESV

Even the unbelieving magician, Simon, “saw” the sign as evidence that power from the Holy Spirit had been received.

Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." Acts 8:17-19 ESV

In light of these passages we can see that the gift of tongues, or the private prayer language, and the baptism of the Spirit go together. We can't say that it's impossible to be baptized in the Holy Spirit without speaking in tongues (for nothing is impossible with God). But we can say it would be an unusual breach of the Biblical pattern. Tongues are the sign that the baptism of power has been received. We can also say from this that if you want to pursue the supernatural workings of Holy Spirit, you will need to be open to receiving the prayer language. It is not for us to dictate to the Lord how He should empower us!

What's It For?

Tongues would be interesting enough if they were “merely” a sign of the mighty power which comes with the baptism in the Spirit. It is a gateway, therefore, leading to the [Nine Gifts of Power](#). But the private prayer language is more than a sign or a gateway to “better things”: it carries powers of its own.

Prayer in tongues “builds up” the believer. The private prayer language is always available to us for praying or singing, either silently or aloud. This strengthens us in our inner spirit.

But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit. Jude 20 ESV

The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. 1 Corinthians 14:4 ESV

Speaking with tongues and deliverance are signs that go with believing. Christians who speak in tongues also exhibit boldness and willingness to do the work of demonic deliverance.

And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues. Mark 16:17 ESV

Praying in tongues is a way of thanking, praising and glorifying God.



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For they heard them talking in [unknown] tongues (languages) and extolling and magnifying God. Acts 10:46 AMP

**What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. 1 Corinthians 14:15-16
ESV**

Praying in tongues is a way of interceding for others. This is especially helpful when we don't know what to pray for or when we want to keep on praying but are feeling hindered by saying the same thing over and over again.

**Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18
ESV**

Praying in tongues provides direct access between our spirit and God's Spirit. It releases the deep burdens within our hearts, cares and concerns that we may only dimly comprehend. Not only that, but by praying in tongues, we literally give the Holy Spirit an opportunity to use our own tongue to intercede through us!

**Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27
ESV**

Paul desired that every believer would speak in tongues—as well as prophecy.

**Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophecy. 1 Corinthians 14:5
ESV**

Desire to receive and cultivate your own prayer language. Then perhaps prayer in tongues in public and prophecy will come as additional gifts.

**Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret... For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. 1 Corinthians 14:13, 17
ESV**

Next Wave of the Spirit to Catch

Nine Gifts of Power Jesus never intended for His church to be powerless or penniless. Just as the tithe is the Lord's provision for material supply, so the baptism in the Spirit is His provision for supernatural supply. Neither is forced on anyone, but when believers come into obedience, watch out! The "windows of heaven" open wide! Through the baptism in the Spirit, Jesus pours out gifts that will manifest as signs and wonders for the sake of ministry to someone He wants to bless.



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The Etiquette of Intimacy Here we seek to lift the veil on aspects of our relationship with the Holy Spirit that are more intimate and subtle and, therefore, harder to describe. That should not surprise us. The closer we get to any mystery, the more mysterious it becomes.

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About the Author: **Steve Evans**



For over a decade Steve Evans and [Healing Streams](#) have been helping people recover inner peace and freedom through the free eCourse for healing, [Matters of the Heart](#). Through Forerunners4Him he has been showing how we can be saved for heaven and teaching the way to live a Spirit-filled life on earth. Go now to receive a completely free primer, [Getting to Heaven](#) and/or an introduction to [Living in the Spirit](#) at our website.



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