

Introduction to Speaking in Tongues

"Speaking in Tongues" is one of the supernatural Gifts of the Holy Spirit referred to in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14, and also serves as a private prayer language used in prayer, worship and spiritual warfare. Speaking in tongues is also called "Glossolalia," "supernatural language," and speaking "in the Spirit." When men were building the tower of Babel for their own prideful purposes (Genesis 11:5-9), God said if men can communicate in unity they will be able to accomplish anything with their hands. Therefore, He scattered them and their language. However, when He gave us the Holy Spirit at Pentecost He also gave us the gift of tongues to unite our language and help empower us in building His new church! (Acts 2:4) The Apostle Paul was very forthright about this gift when he said to the Corinthian church, "do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39).

There are two types of "speaking in tongues":

The Gift of tongues- The Spiritual Gift of tongues is one of the nine listed in 1 Cor. 12 and 14 which we are to "eagerly desire" for use in building up the church. These can manifest as a real foreign language the speaker has never learned, or mere utterances of the Spirit which can be interpreted by someone with the Gift of interpretation. Unlike personal tongues, this supercharged "Gift" of tongues may not be available to everyone (1 Cor 12:30-31), but only as the Spirit might give us as He also gives the other Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor 12:11). Paul and Moses both said we should all prophesy so we can receive/report revelation from God, and Paul said the Gifts of tongues and interpretation used together are for the same purpose as prophecy (1 Cor 12:4-11; 1 Cor 12:28; Acts 2:4-8). Paul's focus in 1 Cor 14 was to discuss the orderly use of spiritual gifts in a church service, and he said speaking in tongues (by supernatural gift or personal use) should be limited inside the church service unless someone can interpret and reveal meaning.

Personal or private tongues- While there is sometimes a manifestation of speaking in tongues when a person receives the Holy Spirit (see the book of Acts), they are not spoken immediately by everyone. Since multiple scriptures encourage believers to talk or sing in tongues, or "in the Spirit," the intent is they can be spoken by every Christian (Mark 16:17; Jude 1:20). They enable man to talk "spirit to Spirit" in a language known only to God and not understood by Satan or by man (unless God has revealed the meaning). Drawing closer to God through this direct communication ignites ministry!

Scriptural examples of speaking in tongues after being filled with the Holy Spirit-Acts 10:46 and 11:15-17 says that when the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles they "spoke with tongues and magnified God"; Again in Acts 19:3-6 the new believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and, "the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied." (See also Acts 2:4). The tongues always glorified God, but not everyone spoke immediately this way.

Scriptural encouragement for all to speak in tongues- In Mark 16:17 Jesus said, "And these signs will follow all who believe: In My name they will cast out demons... they will speak with new tongues;" In Jude 1:20 we are told praying in the Holy Spirit (tongues) will build "yourselves up on your most holy faith;" Paul encourages us to pray both ways in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding (logic) is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What is *the conclusion* then? 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." Praying in the Spirit is also recommended for spiritual battle (Eph 6:18).

Speaking in tongues with interpretation edifies the church and also ministers to others like prophecy; but speaking tongues without interpretation builds and strengthens (edifies) the speaker/believer in relationship with God- In 1 Cor 14:2-4 Paul said, “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. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church;” Paul said in 1 Cor 14:18-19 “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But inside the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two-or at the most three-should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God (e.g., personal prayer language). [1 Corinthians 14:26-28]

Reasons to speak in personal tongues:

- It strengthens your faith and charges up your spirit! The Greek word literally means, “To be charged up like a battery”
- It helps develop faith, because you do not know what you are going to say when you open your mouth, and you rely on Holy Spirit.
- What you receive from the Spirit will help build your mind, body soul and spirit.
- It will help you control your tongue, which James says is impossible by man alone.
- Your spirit is praying directly into the Spirit realm to intercede with important requests before God, even when you don’t know what to pray.
- Speaking in the Spirit is pure and in God’s will, your own prayers may not be.

Speaking in Tongues will not trick you or cause you to say bad things- Paul assured the Corinthians that though they may have done bad things when they were gentiles and gave themselves over to false gods (1 Cor 12:3), they would not be able to speak against Jesus when they became believers and were led by the Holy Spirit. Their intent in following Jesus and the source of the power in the Spirit would prevent them from being deceived. We are also told in Luke 11:9-13 that God will only give us good gifts when we seek Him, and that He freely gives the Holy Spirit.

Putting it into practice: Start by praying and thanking God for the gift of the Holy Spirit, praying that you can have the Holy Spirit’s presence to give praise and thanksgiving to Jesus in tongues. To practice personal tongues for prayer or worship: Push air from your abdomen and put sound on your lips without forming words. Don’t think about saying anything specific, but you can mumble or hum a simple syllable like “ba ba ba” until your lips begin to make different sounds without you thinking of the sounds beforehand (not praying with your understanding). You are trying to express your heart and spirit of love through your mouth without thinking about what words you are going to say. Sometimes it is easier to sing worship in tongues with a melody you know, but without forming specific words while humming syllables as your spirit pushes them forth. You can also ask the prayer team or Pastor for help!