

Why I Won't Apologize for Speaking in Tongues

Last weekend after I spoke at a church in Jacksonville, Florida, a young woman came to the altar to ask for prayer. She had heard me share how Jesus wants us to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can have the boldness to share the gospel—and so that we can experience all the Spirit's miraculous power when we minister to others.

This woman was a bit shy, but after I prayed for her she began to speak in tongues for the first time. It was a new experience for her, but she wants all God has for her. Her fears didn't keep her from claiming something new from God. Her life was changed in that moment.

I've seen this miracle happen countless times—ever since it happened to me when I was 18. I was raised in a church that didn't teach about the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament. In fact, the first person I ever heard speaking in tongues was me, at the moment Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit!

I'm certainly not superior to anyone because I have this gift. Most people have never heard me pray in the Holy Spirit; I do it in my private devotional time. But because I've written about it and preach about it often, some people have questioned it or even accused me of promoting false teaching.

One prominent fundamentalist leader published a book in 2013 in which he claims that speaking in tongues, or *glossolalia* in the Greek, was only valid in New Testament times. This same leader (whom I consider a brother in Christ) mocked my experience in his book and accused me of heresy. In his theology, all supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament stopped after the Bible was

compiled.

People will probably argue about speaking in tongues until Jesus comes back. But the apostle Paul didn't apologize for speaking in tongues. He told the Corinthians: "I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all" (1 Cor. 14:18, NASB). He also emphasized that he prayed in the Spirit privately. The gift of tongues was not a badge Paul wore to prove he was super-spiritual; it was not to be flaunted, showcased, misused or abused. But neither did Paul ignore it or downgrade it.

For Paul, the gift of tongues was a source of inner strength, and I'm sure it was one of the secrets of his success in carrying the gospel to the whole known world. Here are three of the primary reasons we desperately need this gift today:

Praying in the Spirit recharges you. You would probably never go far from your house without your phone charger. Why? You will be disconnected if your battery dies. Praying in the Spirit is God's provision for the strengthening of your "inner man." Paul said: "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1 Cor. 14:4a). The Greek word here for *edifies* means to restore, rebuild or repair. How blessed we are that the Holy Spirit gives us a means to regain new strength when we are weary, overwhelmed, depleted or simply in need of special help.

Praying in the Spirit releases God's wisdom and direction. Paul said that one who speaks in a tongue "speaks mysteries" (1 Cor. 14:2). We don't know what we are saying, yet God reveals His truth to us as we pray. In Romans 8:26, Paul says when we pray in the Spirit, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

I can't count the number of times God has given me inspired solutions to problems while I was praying in tongues. I didn't know what I was saying, yet thoughts popped into my head that I knew were not my own. Why would you want to lean on your own

understanding when we have a means to directly receive God's thoughts and plans when we pray?

Praying in the Spirit unleashes extra power. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples prayed in tongues, and I am sure they continued praying in that manner. The flames on their heads did not remain visible, but the fire continued to blaze inside them. We should never quench the fire of Pentecost; it should be a perpetual flame that we stoke every day. This is why Paul warned the Corinthians: "Do not forbid to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:39b, NASB1995).

Paul prayed both in tongues and in his native language. He wrote: "What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15). Paul didn't limit his prayers to one track; his prayers had what we might describe as a one-two punch. His prayers had double impact because of the added spiritual dimension of a heavenly language.

Like Elisha, we receive a double-portion mantle when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Why be confined to natural limitations when we have been invited to step into a supernatural dimension? Pray in the Spirit often. Stay refilled and charged. Take advantage of every spiritual gift God has given us so the world can see a demonstration of His power. {eoa}

Editor's Note: *In 2022, the global church will celebrate Pentecost on June 5. If you'd like to prepare your heart to celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the early church, you can read Lee Grady's 28-day devotional on the Book of Acts, which is featured on the YouVersion Bible app. Just download the free app and search for "Rekindle the Flame."*

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.