

5 Things You Need to Know About Speaking in Tongues

Without a doubt, speaking in tongues is the most controversial spiritual gift mentioned in the New Testament. Is it from God or the devil? Should believers ignore it, oppose it, or embrace it? There are many legitimate questions regarding the gift of tongues that deserve a thoughtful, biblical response. Let's tackle five of them.

1. Is speaking in tongues from God or the devil?

The most important thing you need to know about speaking in tongues is what Jesus said about it, and He did not mince His words in Mark 16:17: "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues." Jesus declared that tongues is a supernatural sign that can and should accompany everyone who believes in Him. God does not give His children any bad gifts, so we shouldn't fear or ridicule the gift of tongues.

2. Are people making it up when they speak in tongues?

The gift of tongues is a known or heavenly language unknown to the speaker that enables him or her to communicate directly with God. Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:1, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels..." When you receive the gift of tongues, in a split second the Holy Spirit downloads a language into your spirit without you ever having to learn it.

In 2006, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania took brain images of five people while they spoke in tongues. Their research was published in *The New York Times*. The leader of the study team was Dr. Andrew Newberg, who arrived at this conclusion:

"We noticed a number of changes that occurred functionally in

the brain. Our finding of decreased activity in the frontal lobes during the practice of speaking in tongues is fascinating because these subjects truly believe that the spirit of God is moving through them and controlling them to speak. ...Our brain-imaging research shows us that these subjects are not in control of the usual language centers during this activity, which is consistent with their description of a lack of intentional control while speaking in tongues."

When they prayed in tongues, their frontal lobes, the willful part of the brain we use to think and control what we do, were quiet. The language center of their brains—the part we use to speak in our native language—were quiet as well. The people were not in a trance; they were fully aware of what was happening. The researchers were unable to pinpoint which part of the brain was controlling this behavior of speaking in tongues. Dr. Newberg went on to say, "The amazing thing was how the images supported people's interpretation of what was happening. ... The way they describe it, and what they believe, is that God is talking through them."

Speaking in tongues is clearly not a fabricated language, as these scientists have confirmed. It is a spiritual language given to us by God to communicate with Him.

3. Is speaking in tongues a fringe gift that only a few people receive?

The gift of tongues was the most common spiritual gift in the New Testament church. The Bible tells us in Acts 2:4 that all of the original 120 disciples at Pentecost spoke in tongues in the Upper Room: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." We don't know if they all received the gift of faith or healing or discernment, but we know for a fact that all of them received the gift of tongues.

Today, there are more than 600 million charismatic-Pentecostal believers worldwide, the second-largest group of Christians after Catholics. Pentecostals and charismatic churches are by no means a small, fringe movement; on the contrary, they form the fastest-growing religious movement in the world. The gift of tongues is not reserved for a select few. Paul made it clear in 1 Cor. 14:5 that he wanted every believer to pray in tongues (for personal edification) and prophesy (to edify the church): “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy.”

4. Did the gift of tongues cease after the first century, or is it still active today?

The doctrine of cessationism is firmly entrenched in Reformed Christianity. This is the belief that the apostolic and charismatic gifts (including speaking in tongues) ceased after the original 12 apostles passed away. However, several notable early church fathers—such as Justin Martyr (100-165), Irenaeus (115-202), Tertullian (160-220), and Origen (185-254)—recorded that the spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues, were still active in the church in their days, long after John had passed away around 100 AD.

Peter proclaimed in Acts 2:39 that the gift of tongues is for everyone who is called by God: “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13:8-9 that when that which is perfect comes, tongues will cease. That is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ. The Bible teaches that no one is perfect except Jesus. When Christ returns, we will not need to speak in tongues to communicate with God because we will be with Him. But until then, the gift of tongues is available to any believer who desires it.

5. What are people saying when they pray in tongues?

The Bible reveals five main things that happen when believers

pray in tongues:

1. They are speaking directly to God. 1 Corinthians 14:2, "For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit." Tongues is an intimate and direct line of communication with God.

2. They are declaring God's wonders. Acts 2:11, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Far from being nonsense, when we pray in tongues we are actually declaring the wonders and mysteries and majesty of God. How could that possibly be a bad thing?

3. They are praising God. Acts 10:46, "For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God." Even if we don't understand what we are saying when we speak in tongues, we are praising God in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:16).

4. They are edifying themselves. 1 Cor. 14:4, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church." Praying in tongues is like a spiritual workout—it builds you up and makes you stronger spiritually.

5. The Holy Spirit is praying through them, declaring God's will. Romans 8:26-27, "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." Praying in the Spirit will bring revelation and insight into God's will for your life.

If you do not believe in the gift of tongues or have had a bad experience with the charismatic movement, I encourage you to the study the Scriptures with an open mind. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about tongues to you.

If you desire the gift of tongues, pray for it in faith until you receive it. Jesus said in Luke 11:13, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask

him?" Sometimes we have to ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, and knock and keep on knocking until we receive our answer to prayer.

If you already have the gift of tongues, use it every day. In 1 Cor. 14:18, Paul boasted about how often he prayed in tongues: "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you." Tongues is a real language, and as with any language, you have to use it in order to increase your fluency and vocabulary.

Are there excesses and abuse with the use of the gift of tongues? Yes, of course, and they need to be corrected, but don't throw out the baby with the bath water by rejecting the gift of tongues altogether. Let us take the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 14:39 to heart: "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and *do not forbid speaking in tongues*" (emphasis added.)

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