

Paul Spoke in Tongues—So Why Are We Afraid of This Gift?

Two years ago when I was preaching at a church in Florida, a boy named Roczen was filled with the Holy Spirit during a revival service. He was only about 5 years old. But a week later he felt such boldness that he asked his pastor if he could pray for the entire church. When he prayed for the congregation from the stage, several other people were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Roczen is a regular boy who loves to play with his Matchbox cars and video games. But he has a close relationship with Jesus, and he regularly prays in his prayer language. This weekend I watched as Roczen laid hands on my 12-year-old grandson and prayed for him to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are many Christians today who are skeptical about the gift of speaking in tongues because it has never been a part of their experience. And other Christians teach that speaking in tongues is no longer a valid spiritual gift for today—even though they acknowledged that the apostle Paul had this gift and that he told his disciples in Corinth not to forbid using it.

I've had a prayer language since I was 18 years old. No one taught me how to pray in tongues. I was raised in a church that didn't teach about spiritual gifts. In fact, the first person I ever heard speaking in tongues was me, at the moment Jesus baptized me in the Holy Spirit.

I don't think of myself as superior to anyone because I have this gift. Most people have never heard me pray in tongues because I do it privately. 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.

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One prominent fundamentalist leader published a book in 2013 in which he claims that the gift of *glossolalia* (the Greek word for speaking in tongues) was only valid in New Testament times. This same leader mocked my experience. He believes all supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit described in the book of Acts, including healing, stopped after the Bible was compiled.

But the Bible never says God's miracle-working power stopped at any time. We need all the spiritual power heaven has offered us so we can reach the world for Jesus.

The apostle Paul never apologized 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 this gift 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 still need this gift today:

1. Praying in the Spirit recharges you. You would probably never go far from your house without your phone charger, because you need power in your battery. In the same way, praying in the Spirit is God's way of strengthening of your "inner man." Paul said: "The 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.

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

3. Praying in the Spirit unleashes extra power. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples prayed in tongues, and I'm sure they continued praying in that manner. The flames on their heads didn't 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.

Paul prayed both in tongues and in his native language. He wrote: "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. 14:1, NASB 1995). 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 Ghost. Why should we be confined to natural limitations when a supernatural dimension is available? Don't assume this gift is not for you. Ask Jesus to

fill you with His Spirit. If a young child like my friend Roczen can receive this blessing with his childlike faith, so can you.

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