

C Speaking in Tongues

Excerpted from a message by Pastor Chuck Smith,
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What Is Speaking In Tongues?

Many times when someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, God will bless him or her with the gift of speaking in tongues. This is a subject that has brought much confusion to the Church.

When Paul started to preach on this subject he said, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant" (1 Corinthians 12:1). Unfortunately, there is probably more ignorance today on the subject of the Spirit than on any other in the Scriptures.

Speaking in tongues is yielding yourself to the Holy Spirit and by faith beginning to communicate to God in a language you have never studied and do not know.

What Is language?

Language is a pact between people that certain sounds mean certain things. Because of this pact, I am able to move my mouth, tongue and larynx in certain ways to produce sound waves that hit your ears and vibrate bones and nerve endings, sending specific patterns to your brain. Your brain then interprets them based upon previously learned stimuli patterns, which you readily understand as words. This is how I communicate and relate thoughts to you — and you to me.

But speaking in tongues is unlike ordinary communication in that I must bypass my intellect to communicate with God in the Spirit. I must trust the Holy Spirit to speak to God in sound patterns that are unfamiliar to me but known to God.

What is the value of speaking in an unknown tongue? I have many weaknesses. One of them is I don't always know how to pray in a given situation. But when I pray with the help of the Holy Spirit in tongues, He can pray through me, and my prayer goes to the middle of His will. I can be sure this is what God wants me to be praying for.

Paul explains in Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." And in 1 Corinthians 14:14,15 he says, "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with understanding also."

Sometimes in my devotional life I will pray in tongues I don't understand. What value is there in praying something I don't even understand? The value doesn't lie with me. It lies with God. He understands it. So with the help of the Holy Spirit I can get down into deeper areas, and I can begin to praise God in a way that is really fulfilling to me and to God. Paul said concerning speaking in tongues, "Indeed ye do praise God well." It's a very good way to praise the Lord. So I start speaking by faith, with the Holy Spirit prompting me. It is my voice, although it is also the Holy Spirit speaking through me.

Now, I've heard people say, "The Holy Spirit spoke through me, and I had no control of it." But in the Book of Acts we read, "And they began to speak..." In other words, they were speaking with their voices. Likewise, it is your voice when you speak in tongues. You begin to speak, and then the miracle begins — the Holy Spirit begins to prompt your speech.

But the minute you begin to speak in an unknown tongue, Satan will tell you that you're just making it up. That is exactly what he did to me. But Paul said, "I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with understanding." It was in his control to speak in tongues! I can pray in the Spirit any time I want, just by the exercise of my will. By faith I can begin praying with the Spirit. He will prompt my speech, and I will be worshipping God.

What Is The Value Of Speaking In tongues?

Now, I'm not on a "speaking in tongues" kick. I thank God for what it means to me in my own devotional life. To me it is a very edifying experience, and I praise the Lord for it. But I don't go around saying, "Oh, you have to speak in tongues." You don't have to speak in tongues; you can know the fullness of God and the fullness of His love without it. You can be saved, you can be born again, and you can have spiritual blessings without speaking in tongues.

You cannot however, experience a blessing quite like speaking in tongues unless you speak in tongues. It is a blessing in itself. It does not make me any more holy than you are; it does not mean God loves me any more than He loves you. But it is a meaningful experience between God and me.

Evidence Of The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit!

Now, you've heard no doubt people say, "Well, the only true evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is speaking in tongues." But I believe the only true evidence of the filling and the baptism of the Holy Spirit is Agape love: the love that comes from God.

Now, many times I say, "Oh God, I want power in my life. I want the gifts of the Spirit in my life. I want to be able to prophesy, to work miracles, to lay hands on the sick and see them healed, to be a prophet or a teacher." But what is your motivation? I may be able to do all of these things, but if I don't have love I'm a big zero.

You shouldn't seek spiritual gifts to glory in yourself. You should seek, as Paul prayed, "That you might be filled with the fullness of God." All of the fringe benefits that go along with fullness are fine, but don't seek the benefits, seek the Giver! Seek Jesus Christ and His fullness. Open your heart to Him and let God pour His blessing upon you!

For a more complete explanation of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, we recommend you read the books, "Charisma vs. Charismania" and "Living Water: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Life," both by Chuck Smith.