

Introduction to Charismatic Gifts

Study Notes on Speaking in Tongues and Praying In the Spirit

(1) What is happening when we speak in tongues?

(A) You are the one speaking, not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not taking over your mind or your mouth. He does not possess people.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

(B) You are speaking words (utterance) given by the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:4 above). This is a stream of words from the Holy Spirit into your spirit.

(C) Your spirit is speaking.

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful... (1 Cor. 14:14)

What is being emphasized in this passage is that his spirit is praying something his mind does not understand and is not involved in.

(D) This is *volitional*, meaning it is an act of your own will.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.... (1 Cor. 14:15)

Notice that he can choose which he wishes to do at any given moment, again showing this to be a volitional activity.

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all, yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:18-19)

(2) Tongues are primarily expressions of praise and worship

(A) Praise. This verse shatters the idea that speaking in tongues was preaching. It was not!

...we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (Acts 2:11)

(B) Mysteries

For he who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men, but to God: for no man understands; however in the spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Cor. 14:2)

(C) Prayer

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful... (1 Cor. 14:14)

(D) Song (that is, worship that is sung)

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.... (1 Cor. 14:15)

(E) Blessing and thanksgiving:

Otherwise when you shall bless with the spirit, how will he that occupies the place of the unlearned say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, seeing he does not understand what you say? For you truly are giving thanks well, but the other is not edified. (1 Cor. 14:16-17)

(3) The “gift of tongues” compared to “devotional tongues”

(A) Gift of tongues

Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Cor. 12:27-30)

All these questions require a “no” answer. The point is that these are ministries or offices. Not all have an ongoing ministry in speaking in tongues to the body, tongues which would need to be interpreted.

(B) As used personally (commonly referred to as a “prayer language”)

He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself ... (1 Cor. 14:4)

Some have frowned on this, as though personal edification were something bad or selfish. Would anyone fault you for seeking personal edification through the Word of God? No. What Paul is complaining about is not the use of the gift but the selfish use of the gift when we are among others.

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all, yet in the church... (1 Cor. 14:18-19)

This shows that Paul did speak in tongues a great deal when he was outside of the “context” of church. In fact, he did it more than any of them! This alone should show its value to him – and to us! Paul himself said that the Corinthians came behind in no gift [*charisma*]. (1 Cor. 1:7)

Here is another passage showing that it is perfectly appropriate to pray in tongues for your own private edification.

But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. (1 Cor. 14:28)

(4) God Wants Us to Use Tongues to Edify Ourselves and Help Us Pray

(A) Praying with groanings, etc.

Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities; for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he who searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to (the will of) God. And we know that all things work together for good to those

who love God, to those who are the called [ones] according to his purpose. (Rom. 8:26-28)

The word “helps” in verse 26 means “pulling with you against something.” Although this verse is often used in reference to intercession in other tongues, the context is actually groaning, a form of prayer which also seems to bypass the soulish, thinking part of us. We should recall that Jesus Himself prayed this way, as we read twice in the story of the raising of Lazarus (John 11:33, 38) However, there are simply too many testimonies of intercession in tongues and the miraculous results God has worked through it to discount the possibility that Paul is also thinking of it here.

Notice that it is not a matter of *how* to pray, in terms of finding the right style of prayer, but a question of *what* - that is, *the actual content* of our prayers. Such praying enables us to pray for things we know nothing about, as the Spirit gives us content to pray. This is another reason why tongues and not merely groanings should be brought in under this verse.

The Father understands the heart of the Spirit as the Spirit and the believer pray together on a matter. Most comfortingly, the person praying this way

enters into a new realm of prayer in which, "unconsciously," we join in the Spirit's perfect knowledge of the will of God and how to pray, as Paul says, "according to God." By this means we can also avoid praying wrongful, soulish prayers in which our intercession is tainted and shaped by what *we* feel the person needs in regard to character, outcomes of situations, etc.

(B) Communing with God in the various forms described in 1 Cor. 14 such as praise, worship, and thanksgiving. These may be sung as well as spoken. (See the references above.)

(C) Edification of your spirit man.

He that speaks in a tongue edifies himself... (1 Cor. 14:4)

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all... (1 Cor. 14:18)

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20)

How important is this? Jesus said that out of our innermost being would flow rivers of living waters. (John 7:38) Praying and worshipping in other tongues allows us to release these streams of living waters out into the deserts of our life and the lives of others... How much we should use it and how often it is neglected!

In our own opinion, the more someone speaks and prays in tongues, the more manifestations of the other gifts of the Spirit he will see. This is probably because the spirit begins to take primacy in the person as the dominant “organ” or component of our humanity over the soul.

(Remember that when Paul refers to the three-part nature of man he says, “spirit, soul, and body,” 1 Thess. 5:23) The person is therefore quicker and better able to respond to the Spirit’s promptings.

So much time could be spent just sharing testimonies of the blessings and answers to prayer that have come as people have edified themselves in other tongues and sought the Lord through this type of prayer!