

Th123 A Study of the Holy Spirit

Th123-26 Speaking in Tongues: Its Blessings and Benefits

A young man was hungry for more of God. He wanted to be empowered by the Spirit so he could more effectively serve the Lord. However, when he was told that he should expect to speak in tongues when he was baptized in the Holy Spirit, he became troubled.

“Do I *have* to speak in tongues?” he asked. “What good is speaking in tongues anyway?” In this lesson, we will answer this young man’s question. We will discuss some of the blessings and benefits that come into a Christian’s life through prayer in tongues.

While most Christians know that speaking in tongues is found in the Bible, few have a clear understanding of its nature and purpose. In Lesson 18, we learned that speaking in tongues is the “initial physical evidence” of one’s being baptized in the Holy Spirit. However, speaking in tongues is much more than a mere evidence that one has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

In fact, speaking in tongues was the common practice of early Christians. The New Testament speaks of the practice in five different passages. In His Great Commission, as recorded by Mark, Jesus told His disciples that believers would speak in tongues. Later, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, the Bible says that all of the disciples “were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). Two more times in the Book of Acts we read of believers speaking in tongues upon receiving the Holy Spirit (10:46; 19:6). In First Corinthians, Paul taught in detail about the gift of tongues. And finally, in Romans 8, Paul was likely referring to tongues when he said that “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom 8:26). The Bible further teaches that speaking in tongues will continue as a practice in the church until Jesus comes again to establish His perfect kingdom in the earth.

What then is speaking in tongues? Speaking in tongues is a wonderful spiritual experience that occurs when the Spirit of God moves freely on the spirit of a yielded believer. Under the Spirit’s impulse the Spirit-filled believer speaks in a language he or she does not know. Paul described speaking in tongues as a “manifestation of the Spirit” (1Cor 12:7). It is thus a supernatural experience coming from the Spirit of God. The words spoken can be in any human language or dialect (Acts 2:8), or they can be a heavenly language (1Cor 13:1). The Bible teaches that every believer should desire to speak in tongues: “These signs will accompany those who believe ... they will speak in new tongues” (Mark 16:17).

The young man wondered, “*But what good is speaking in tongues?*” To answer his question, speaking in tongues can bring great blessing to both the church in general and individual believers in particular. It can do this in three important ways: It can serve as a sign to believers and nonbelievers; it can assist Christians in their private devotions; and it can serve as a means of strengthening the church. Let’s look at each of these beneficial results of speaking in tongues.

When someone is baptized in the Holy Spirit, he or she will speak in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance (Acts 2:4). This miraculous, Spirit-inspired speech in an unlearned language serves as a sign to that person, and to the entire congregation of believers, that he or she has been empowered to speak for Christ. It is the first fulfillment of Jesus' promise in Acts 1:8: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses." We will discuss this more in the next lesson.

Speaking in tongues also serves as a "sign to unbelievers" who witness the event (1Cor 14:22). When unbelievers hear a follower of Christ speaking in tongues, they are made aware that God is present. They realize that His Spirit is moving among the people. In ancient times, a trumpet call signaled that a herald was about to make an important announcement. In much the same way, an utterance in tongues can serve as a signal to the unbeliever that something important and supernatural is taking place. On the Day of Pentecost, when the crowds heard the disciples speaking in tongues, they were "bewildered" and "amazed" (Acts 2:6-7). Their hearts were opened and made ready to hear Peter proclaim the gospel.

Prayer in tongues is also of great benefit to one's personal spiritual life. During times of private devotion, Spirit-inspired tongues can function as a personal prayer language. As one prays in tongues, he or she is made acutely aware of the Spirit's dynamic presence within. Such an awareness can become a source of great confidence and joy.

Paul said, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (1Cor 14:4). Jude exhorted believers to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Spirit" (v. 20). To pray in tongues, a believer must put his or her confidence in God, and they must yield themselves completely to the Holy Spirit. As they do these things, they learn to more fully trust in God and His grace. Tongues are further a perfect outlet for praise and worship. Paul taught that the person who speaks in an unknown tongue is "praising God with [his or her] spirit" and giving thanks to Him (1Cor 14:16).

Finally, as we discussed in Lesson 21, prayer in tongues can sometimes function as a means of intercessory prayer. Paul talked about this kind of prayer in Romans 8. He said that, as humans, we are limited in our ability to pray. The Spirit, however, offers to help us. Paul writes, "But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." The "groans too deep for words" include prayer in tongues. The Spirit thus intercedes through us in words of His choosing, and He does so "in accordance with God's will" (Rom 8:26-27).

Tongues can also properly function as a gift of the Holy Spirit in public worship (1Cor 12:10, 28). In First Corinthians 12-14, Paul instructed the church concerning the proper use of the gift. In this context, the gift of tongues is to be exercised in combination with the gift of the interpretation of tongues. These two spiritual gifts thus work together to build up the church. "When you come together, everyone has a hymn or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (1Cor 14:26).

When properly exercised, they bless the congregation in two significant ways. On some occasions, the Spirit may use these gifts to communicate divine truth and insight to God's

people. On other occasions, He may inspire individuals to offer up Spirit-directed prayers on behalf of the congregation. In either case, the result is that the church is strengthened.

Prayer in tongues, whether used in private devotions or in public worship, can be a great spiritual blessing. We should not neglect the use of this wonderful gift from God.

This lesson is **important** because through it you have learned about the nature and benefits of speaking in tongues.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that speaking in tongues is a wonderful gift from God as a sign to the unbeliever, for the blessing of the believer, for the building up of the church, and for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson:

1. What is speaking in tongues?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Speaking in tongues is an experience from God that occurs when the Spirit of God moves upon the spirit of a yielded believer inspiring him or her to speak in a language they have never learned," you are correct.
2. When one is baptized in the Holy Spirit and begins to speak in tongues, what does this indicate?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that, in this instance, speaking in tongues indicates that the person has been empowered to witness for Christ, you are right.
3. How does speaking in tongues serve as a sign to nonbelievers?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you said, "Speaking in tongues serves as a sign to nonbelievers by making them aware that God is present and moving among His people," you are right.
4. How can prayer in tongues benefit the believer in his or her times of private devotion?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that during times of personal devotion tongues can serve as a personal prayer language, a source of personal edification, and a means of intercessory prayer, you answered correctly.
5. How can the gifts of tongues and the interpretation of tongues benefit a congregation gathered for worship?
 - A. [PAUSE] If you answered that in public worship, tongues and interpretation can strengthen the church by communicating divine truth and insight to the congregation and by offering up Spirit-directed prayers on their behalf, you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to begin to pray in tongues daily during your times of personal devotion. Memorize these two important verses from God's Word:

- "These signs will accompany those who believe ... they will speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:17)

- “When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Then, gather a group of people and teach them the truths you have learned in this lesson.