

Session 6 Praying in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. For about five years in my early ministry I taught against speaking in tongues. But I was perplexed by one verse related to this subject—Paul claimed that he spoke in tongues more than all the other believers who lived in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:18). Why did he value this gift so much that he engaged in it more than anyone? He was a busy man, so why did he invest so much time speaking in tongues?

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

- B. If Paul valued praying in tongues as much as he seemed to, then I had to rethink my position. This verse gives us a glimpse into Paul’s personal prayer life and his view on the gift of tongues.

II. TWO DIFFERENT TYPES OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- A. Paul described two different types of the gift of tongues—two expressions with two different purposes. This helps us to better understand two statements that seem contradictory, that “not all” have the gift of tongues (1 Cor. 12:30), yet “all” can receive it (1 Cor. 14:5; cf. Mk. 16:17).

⁷***The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each for the profit of all: ⁸for to one is given the word of wisdom...¹⁰to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues...***

³⁰***Do all speak with tongues? (1 Cor. 12:7-10, 30)***

²***For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him...***

⁴***He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself...⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:2-5)***

- B. In 1 Corinthians 12:30, Paul asked a rhetorical question, signifying that not every believer has the gift of tongues to profit the corporate body: “Do all speak with tongues?”
- C. In 1 Corinthians 12, the gift of tongues that Paul referred to was “for the profit of all,” yet he wrote in 1 Corinthians 14 about tongues that bring personal edification to the one speaking in tongues.
- D. There is a difference between the gift of tongues given *to a few* for the *profit of the corporate body* (1 Cor. 12:7) when the speaker *speaks to men*, and the gift of tongues given *to all* as a devotional prayer language for the *profit of the individual* who speaks *privately to God* (1 Cor. 14:2, 4).
- E. Paul indicated that *all* can have the gift of tongues for their personal lives (1 Cor. 14:5, 39). Jesus included speaking in tongues as one of the signs that would follow those who believe (Mk. 16:17).
- ⁵***I wish you all spoke with tongues...³⁹and do not forbid to speak with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:5, 39)***
- ¹⁷***“These signs will follow those who believe...they will speak with new tongues.” (Mk. 16:17)***
- F. When Paul wrote of “speaking in tongues more than anyone” (1 Cor. 14:18), he was referring to using his personal prayer language, not to giving an utterance in tongues in a public church service. Thus, in my early ministry I taught against tongues based on one aspect of Paul’s teaching—that *all do not have the gift of tongues* to speak out in a public worship service (1 Cor. 12:30).

III. THREE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES

- A. Paul identified three specific benefits of speaking in tongues: speaking mysteries (v. 2); edifying oneself (v. 4); and blessing and giving thanks to God (v. 17).
- B. **Speaking mysteries:** When we speak in tongues in a devotional way, we commune with the Spirit who gives information that helps us to understand God’s will and heart for us. Speaking mysteries is not about receiving “special truths” that are available to only a few. Paul was not referring to secret, elite information some might gain about spiritual things as the Gnostics claimed to have.

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

1. As our spirit communes with the Spirit of God, we may receive faint and subtle impressions from the Lord in the way that words of knowledge come to us. These impressions may give us insight as to how God wants to touch us or someone else through our prayers. They may be insights about our calling, life, or areas of brokenness and pain where our heart needs healing.
2. We may receive a mental picture of someone or see their pain or discouragement or a need they have. We may receive direction about how to pray for or serve God’s plans for other people, cities, and nations. Or the Spirit may show us something in our lives, such as the need to humble ourselves to someone or reach out in relationship. Often the mysteries that the Spirit highlights are practical issues in which He wants to minister to us or through us.
3. Before ministering to a group, I seek to pray in the Spirit to position myself to receive impressions, mental pictures, phrases, and direction from the Spirit to guide and help me. It is good to pray for the interpretation of what you are praying for (1 Cor. 14:13). As you do, the Holy Spirit may give you insight into what is on His heart for a particular situation.

¹³***Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. (1 Cor. 14:13)***

4. Paul spoke of the Spirit as searching the depths of God to reveal them to us. He is our glorious escort into the deep things of God’s heart, Word, and will (1 Cor. 2:10-12). The Spirit possesses full knowledge of the Father and Son—one preacher spoke of Him as the ultimate “search engine” of God’s heart. He gives us a portion of what He searches out as we engage more with Him by speaking to Him with our minds and by praying with our spirit.

¹⁰***For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...¹²We have received...the Spirit... that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Cor. 2:10-12)***

- C. **Edifying oneself:** Edifying oneself means being strengthened, or built up. Paul was encouraging them to “charge their spiritual batteries.” Praying in the Spirit results in our hearts becoming more sensitive to the things of the Spirit (Jude 20). We may not feel anything when we pray in the Spirit, but we should not seek to measure what is happening by what we feel in that moment.

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

²⁰***...building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit. (Jude 20)***

- D. **Blessing and thanking God:** We bless and thank God when we pray or sing in tongues. Paul wrote that he who speaks in a tongue speaks to God (1 Cor. 14:2). Speaking in tongues is a gift that we use to bless, praise, and worship God in a way that differs from giving thanks only with our minds. ***²For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God...¹⁶If you bless with the spirit, how will he [others] ...say “Amen” at your giving of thanks...? ¹⁷You indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. (1 Cor. 14:2, 16-17)***
- E. Because we speak to God when we pray in tongues, we should specifically direct our attention to Him and not just speak mindlessly into the air. When I pray in tongues, I often focus my mind on the scene centered on God’s throne in heaven (Revelation 4) and speak directly to the Father. At other times I speak to the Holy Spirit who dwells in my spirit (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:14).
- F. Paul referred to praying night and day, or praying without ceasing (1 Thes. 3:10; 5:17). One way he was able to pray so consistently was by praying in tongues while doing other things, such as making tents (Acts 18:3; 20:34) or walking from one city to the next.

IV. PRAYING AND SINGING IN THE SPIRIT

- A. Praying “with the spirit” and praying “in the spirit” includes praying in tongues. We can pray with our understanding (our minds) and with our spirits. Both types of praying are important, but praying with our spirit impacts us in a different way than praying with our minds. God designed us so that our spirit engages with God by speaking or singing in tongues (1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). ***¹⁵I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. (1 Cor. 14:15)***
- B. Both singing with our spirit and with our understanding is important in our spiritual life. Paul taught that if we sing to God from our hearts, we would experience God’s grace and the Spirit’s presence. ***¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col. 3:16)***
- C. One way we are filled with the Spirit is by singing spiritual songs in our heart to the Lord. ***¹⁸...but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Eph. 5:18-19)***
- D. By singing the Word and singing with our spirit, our heart becomes more sensitive to the Spirit. I have discovered the power of spontaneously singing Bible passages to God and intermittently singing in tongues, which often results in the Holy Spirit’s touching the deep chambers of my heart.
- E. Singing the Word impacts our hearts more than just speaking it or hearing others speak it. God designed our heart to be touched deeply by music and singing. As we sing the Word and sing with our spirit, we receive mysteries (impressions from the Holy Spirit) and gain insight from the Word. The Spirit will give us more and more if we will sing the Word and sing with our spirit consistently.
- F. I encourage people to start by seeking to pray in the Spirit for fifteen minutes a day.

V. BEING CONSIDERATE WHEN PRAYING IN TONGUES

- A. Paul spoke of times in church services when it is best not to pray in tongues out loud, but rather to pray in tongues *to oneself and to God*. He spoke of it as a practical expression of edifying others and seeking to excel in love (1 Cor. 14:12). In a public gathering such as a church service or prayer meeting, it is important not to distract others when praying in tongues. A public prayer room is like a public living room. There are many different types of personalities sharing this “living room.”
- ¹²...let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel...²⁸If there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Cor. 14:12, 28)***
- B. We show love and consideration for others by praying in tongues quietly to avoid distracting them. If the majority of the people in the prayer meeting are singing in the Spirit or praying aloud in the Spirit together, then by all means join in. If you are one of the only people praying out loud in tongues in a meeting, then do it quietly to yourself. It does not quench the Spirit to pray in tongues quietly; in fact, it honors the Lord when we show love and consideration for His people.
- C. We can pray quietly in tongues under our breath anywhere without allowing others to hear us. I do this in leadership meetings, at family meals, or when walking down the hall to my next meeting.

VI. RECEIVING THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- A. It is significant that Jesus mentioned praying in tongues in the context of the Great Commission. I believe we will be more effective in ministry if we include both casting out devils and speaking in tongues. They go hand in hand in successfully engaging in the Great Commission.
- ¹⁵“Go into all the world and preach the gospel...¹⁷These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues.” (Mk. 16:15-17)***
- B. Being edified in our spiritual lives by praying in tongues is an essential aspect of walking in the Spirit and ministering in His power. I have never known anyone who operated in the prophetic or the healing ministry who did not speak in tongues regularly in their private prayer time.
- C. Praying in tongues is a universal benefit for all believers. It is not a requirement or proof of salvation; rather, it is a benefit available to us through the work of Jesus and the indwelling of the Spirit. It is not reserved for those with a special calling. It does not require any special training, qualification, or preparation. It is a free gift to all as a part of the benefits of our salvation.
- ⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues...¹⁸I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all;
³⁹...desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. (1 Cor. 14:5, 18, 39)***
- D. If you have never received your devotional prayer language (the gift of tongues), then you can ask for it now. It is simple—just ask the Lord to release this particular aspect of His grace to you. Some say, if the Spirit wants them to speak in tongues, *then He will make them*. However, the Spirit will not “force” anyone to speak in tongues. Some wait for an *overwhelming* sense of the Spirit, but often the Spirit touches His people like a gentle breeze. Therefore, as you pray for the release of the gift of tongues, you may simply feel the presence of God lightly or just a gentle urge to speak out. I encourage you to speak out the words that come to you and see what the Holy Spirit does.