

The following article appears in *50 Tough Questions: Relevant Answers for Today's Concerns*, compiled and edited by Hal Donaldson and Ken Horn. Pentecostal Evangel Books/Gospel Publishing House, 2002.

## DO I REALLY NEED TO SPEAK IN TONGUES?

"Do I really need to pray in tongues?" some Christians ask.

Others question, "Why did God choose tongues as the initial, physical evidence of Spirit baptism?"

As we view praying in tongues in the light of Scripture, we discover seven values.

### **Adoration**

When we are baptized in the Spirit, we are immersed into an environment of the Spirit, where God becomes the greatest reality in our lives. He touches every aspect of our being.

Naturally, we respond in adoration and worship. But human words fail to express what we feel. We grope for the right words and thoughts; all fall short.

Then we receive His words, "as the Spirit enables" (see Acts 2:4\*). This bypasses the limitations of human mind and tongue, allowing us to freely express the inexpressible. We discover that tongues are the perfect gift for adoration and worship.

The first instance of worship in tongues occurred on the Day of Pentecost. Jews from abroad marveled, "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (Acts 2:11). Later, Peter—along with the Jewish believers with him—heard Cornelius' household "speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:46).

### **Breaking in**

When we are baptized, or filled with God's Spirit, we do not simply have the hope of His presence, believing that He is

working in our lives. But we experience the immediacy of His presence and activity.

Donald Gee said, "The Spirit was not vaguely received by faith, through mental assent to a doctrine." Rather, Spirit baptism is the observable breaking into our existence by God's Spirit. He does not slip in unnoticed, but "comes on" (see Acts 10:45). Tongues expresses and confirms this divine inbreaking.

### **Calling to communicate**

Baptism in the Spirit is not a spiritual badge indicating our maturity or achievement. Nor is it a spiritual toy for our enjoyment. The manifestation of tongues indicates that Spirit baptism enhances our communication. It confirms Jesus' declaration: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

### **Dominion**

James observes that "no man can tame the tongue" (James 3:8). Tongues demonstrates our willingness to submit to God's dominion. By obediently speaking the words that He gives, we signify our openness and submission to His Spirit.

### **Edification**

Paul declares, "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" (I Corinthians 14:4). Tongues builds us up.

Personally, I am edified because it enables me to experience God's immediate presence and activity in my life.

## **Freedom**

When I have a serious concern, often I'm not sure how to pray, or even for what I should pray. Thankfully, I do not have to figure out the proper requests or the appropriate form of prayer.

In these times, instead of praying "with my mind," I have the freedom to pray "with my spirit" (1 Corinthians 14:15). This means allowing God's Spirit to shape the language of my prayer. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

Especially as we engage in spiritual warfare, we are to "pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests" (Ephesians 6:18).

## **Gateway to the gifts**

We are to manifest the gifts of the Spirit "for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). But how do we know which gifts and when to use them? Praying in tongues is a gateway to using the gifts of the Spirit, because through it we practice listening to the Spirit and responding.

Stanley Horton writes, "The value of tongues...in teaching us to respond to the Spirit simply and in childlike faith is important."

God, in His wisdom, has chosen tongues as the initial, physical evidence of baptism in His Spirit. This choice is not arbitrary, but directly connected to what He is doing in and through our lives.

—**Stephen Lim**, Practical Theology Department Chairperson and Associate Professor of Leadership and Ministry at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary ([www.agts.edu](http://www.agts.edu))

*\*Scripture references in this chapter are from the New International Version.*