

Session 7: Praying in the Spirit

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. When I was younger, I remember stumbling into my father's study where he would be praying in tongues before preaching. When I was eleven years-old, I attended a youth camp where Holy Spirit came on me in an notable way, and I spoke in tongues. The experience changed my life. However, shortly after receiving the gift, I rarely spoke in tongues until my early twenties.
- B. The Lord showed me *the benefits* of using this gift *to build up my spirit, stir the prophetic, assist deliverance ministry, and gain insight* from the Lord. As I began to teach on the gift of tongues, I found that while many churches believed in speaking in tongues, few taught on it and actively pursued the gift, leaving many unequipped or lacking understanding regarding this topic.
- C. What gives many believers pause is the apostles Paul's view of the gift of tongues. He 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?
- ¹⁸I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all... (1 Cor. 14:18)***
- D. This verse gives us a glimpse into Paul's personal prayer life and his view on the gift of tongues. If the Holy Spirit placed this verse in the Bible, we should pay attention and teach on this gift.

II. TWO TYPES OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES IN THE BIBLE

- A. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul described two different expressions of the gift of tongues. Misunderstanding happens regarding tongues when we do not acknowledge both uses and purposes.
- B. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul stated *the public use* of spiritual gifts was for *the benefit of all* (v. 7). With his rhetorical question, in 12:30, "Do all speak in tongues," Paul stated *not everyone had this gift*.
- ⁷The 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... ³⁰Do all speak with tongues? (1 Cor. 12:7-10, 30)***
- C. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul states that tongues is *for private use, addressing God directly* (v. 2) *to edify oneself* (v. 4). He affirmed that "all" could receive the gift to use for their personal lives (1 Cor. 14:5; cf. Mk. 16:17).
- ²For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him... ⁴He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself... ⁵I wish you all spoke with tongues... (1 Cor. 14:2-5)***
- D. Jesus said that speaking in tongues was one of the signs that would follow those who believe (Mk. 16:17).
- ¹⁷These signs will follow those who believe...they will speak with new tongues; (Mk. 16:17)***

- E. So by comparing these passages, one may ask, which is it? Public or private, to the body or to God, to benefit all or for the individual, for a select group or a gift for all to receive? The answer is “yes”—both!
- F. Thus, the two gift of tongues has two expressions—
 - 1. One that is given *to a few* (1 Cor. 12:30) for the *profit of the corporate body* when the speaker *speaks to them* (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:12, 27);
 - 2. Another that is given *to all* (1 Cor. 14:5, 39) for the *profit of the individual* who speaks *privately to God* in a devotional prayer language (1 Cor. 14:2, 4, 18).
- G. When Paul wrote of “speaking in tongues more than anyone” (1 Cor. 14:18), he referred to using his personal prayer language, not to giving an utterance in tongues in a public church service.
- H. A common result from misunderstanding that this gift has two separate uses and purposes results in *trepidation in pursuing the gift of devotional tongues* (praying in the spirit), thinking only some can receive it. For others, they may think that *devotional tongues must be interpreted in a service* if they hear it.

III. THREE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES (DEVOTIONAL 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). We can also call this devotional tongues.
- 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.

²For 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. When praying in devotional tongues, it is good to pray for the interpretation (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)
- 2. This information often times *comes in the moment* or *later* as faint and subtle impressions from the Lord. These impressions may include how the Lord wants to touch someone or what is on His heart in a certain situation—a pain someone has, insight about their person, family, work, etc... They may come as faint mental pictures, feelings or insights. They may refer to our own lives as well.
- 3. Before ministering, I will seek to pray in tongues to position myself to receive impressions from the Holy Spirit to guide and help me. Sometimes I do not get many impressions until I am ministering.

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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). When we pray in the Spirit and with our mind to seek the Lord, the Holy Spirit releases understanding to us.

¹⁰For 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 to be strengthened or built up in the spirit. Praying in the Spirit sensitizes our hearts to the Spirit and refreshes us. We may not feel anything when we pray in the Spirit, but we should not measure what is happening by what we feel in that moment.

⁴He 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. General Principles when Praying in Tongues:

1. ***Focusing our Attention***. Because we speak to God when we pray in tongues, we should direct our attention to Him. There are two focuses I have found helpful. First I can speak directly to the Father, focusing my mind on the scene centered around His throne in heaven (Revelation 4). Other times I speak to the Holy Spirit who dwells in my spirit (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:14).
2. ***Unceasing Prayer***. 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.
3. ***Praying with your mind and in tongues***. Praying "with the spirit" and "in the spirit" includes praying in tongues. We can pray with our understanding (our native tongue) and with our spirits. Both types of praying are important, but praying with our spirit impacts us in a different way.

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)

4. ***Singing in the Spirit and Singing the Word***. When we combine singing the Word, singing in the spirit and singing our prayers, it reaches our hearts and enriches us simply because we added music and singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

- F. I encourage people to start by seeking to pray in the Spirit for fifteen minutes a day.

IV. BEING CONSIDERATE WHEN PRAYING IN TONGUES

- A. In a public gathering such as a church service or prayer meeting, it is important not to distract others when praying in tongues. Paul spoke of times in church services when it is best not to pray in tongues out loud, but *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; 12:31b-13:13).

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. *A public prayer room (or church service) is like a public living room.* There are many different types of personalities sharing this “living room.” Things you do in one room of the house isn’t necessarily appropriate for things you do in other rooms. We must not treat our church services in the same manner as our private worship times.
- C. *Principle of the room:* As a general rule, it is best to pray in the spirit slightly softer than the volume in the room since it is a public setting. Also, when in interdenominational settings where there are differing views about tongues, for the sake of unity, it is best to pray in tongues quietly. There are many other ways in which we can excel in love by using this gift. Paul called it the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 13:21).
- D. We can pray quietly in tongues under our breath anywhere without others hearing us. You can do this when in meetings, during meals or walking down the hall.

V. RECEIVING THE GIFT OF TONGUES

- A. It is significant that Jesus mentioned praying in tongues in the context of the Great Commission—that for us to cast out devils, preach and heal with greater efficacy, tongues should be a part of our lifestyle.

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 ¹⁸...they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (Mk. 16:15-18)

- B. Tongues will allow you to edify yourself, help you walk in the Spirit and minister in His power.
- C. Praying in tongues is a universal benefit for our salvation. It is not a requirement or proof of 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. You can ask the Lord to release this grace on you to speak in your devotional prayer language.
- E. 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.

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- F. I like to make the analogy of a water flowing through the pipes in a house. The faucet must be open for the water to flow out, otherwise the water stays in the pipes. Likewise if we do not open our mouths and speak, the words of the Spirit in tongues will remain inside us.