

Four Biblical Reasons Why Paul Thanked God He Spoke In Tongues

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The church at Corinth was a thoroughly pentecostal First Century body of Holy Spirit filled believers. As such they were enjoying the operation of the gifts of the Spirit.

At the same time, they were in need of apostolic correction and guidance in how to function properly in the vocal gifts. They had to learn the “courtesy” of the gifts; the sequence of public tongues and interpretation; the proper limits on how many tongues and interpretation and prophecies in a service.

They had to learn that believers are not to utter their personal prayers and thanksgiving out loud in tongues before the whole church. Although the Holy Spirit will graciously grant to the believer such expressions of thanksgiving and prayer, they do not benefit to the other person. Five words that people understand would do more good to the church than ten thousand words in tongues that are not interpreted.

All of this necessary correction has resulted in an erroneous impression in the minds of many believers that the gift of tongues *itself*, rather than its misuse, is the problem.

Nothing could be farther from the truth, for in verse 18, in the very heart of his corrective instructions, the apostle Paul made this clear statement: “I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all.”

That should have prevented any misunderstanding of the true intent of Paul’s instructions. Paul’s purpose was not to “dump water on the fire,” but to pick up the stray coals and put them back in place.

So what is so valuable about speaking in tongues that Paul thanked God he spoke in tongues more than the Corinthian believers? What are the spiritual benefits of speaking in tongues that made the gift so valuable to Paul, to the early Church, and that makes it valuable to believers today?

For the answer we go directly to the Scriptures.

As we do, it is important to define what is meant by “praying in the Spirit.”

Praying in the Spirit is praying in tongues, praying in a language that the person who is praying does not know nor understand, in contrast to “praying with the understanding” (mind). That is Paul’s apostolic definition in 1 Corinthians 14:14, 15, and it is the biblical definition we will follow.

Both the Holy Spirit and the believer's human spirit act together in praying in tongues. Spirit-filled believers pray *in the Spirit* (Ephesians 6:18) *with their spirit* (1 Corinthians 14:15).

The Amplified Version captures this in its rendering of 1 Corinthians 14:15.

“Then what am I to do? I will pray with the spirit [by the Holy Spirit that is within me] and I will pray with the mind [using words I understand]; I will sing with the spirit [by the Holy Spirit that is within me] and I will sing with the mind [using words I understand].”

The four spiritual benefits of praying in tongues presented here are not given in any order of importance, for all of them are important to the believer.

They are as follows.

Reason One.

The believer blesses and gives thanks to God well. “For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified.” (1 Corinthians 14:17).

The *positive* statement here is that in speaking in tongues the believer gives thanks well. *The Holy Spirit does not misspeak God’s praises*, even when the praises are given in an inappropriate time and place, and no one else is edified.

Only the Holy Spirit is able to express verbally the full praises of God.

Praise, worship and thanksgiving spoken in the Spirit is perfect.

Reason Two.

The believer edifies himself.

“He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church” (1 Corinthians 14:4).

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20, 21).

Personal spiritual edification is one of the most important purposes and benefits of speaking in tongues in prayer.

For Paul to speak in tongues more than all the Corinthian believers, praying in tongues must have become almost as “natural” to him as breathing — an ever fresh and refreshing source of edification. It is for many believers today.

Reason Three.

The believer speaks mysteries.

“But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

“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 Corinthians 14:2).

When praying in tongues, at times the believer speaks mysteries, divine secrets, speaking about things known only to God, not even to the believer. The believer does not know what he or she is saying, but is aware of the Spirit's energizing while praying.

One is inclined to think that these “mysteries” include the tongues of angels mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:1 that the man described in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 (probably Paul himself) heard while in Paradise, inexpressible words that are not lawful for a human being himself to utter but are natural for the Holy Spirit.

Reason Four.

The believer prays for other believers according to the will of God.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—” (Ephesians 6:18).

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. 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. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26, 27).

This applies specifically to praying in tongues for other believers.

In Ephesians 6:18 perseverance in praying in the Spirit is closely joined to putting on the whole armor of God. Both are part of the believer's spiritual warfare.

In Romans 8:26 and 27 the believer senses a deep burden of prayer in his or her own spirit, but does not know what and how to pray as he or she ought in order to put words to the prayer. So the Spirit Himself makes intercession in our groanings (*stenagmoi* — dative) that we cannot express in words.

Does the Holy Spirit help us by groaning non-verbally and subaudibly along with us? of course not. The Holy Spirit helps us by putting *our* groanings into words – *His* words.

The omniscient Holy Spirit is never at a loss for words. The Holy Spirit comes to our aid and releases our groaning in our “prayer language” (tongues).

An Age-long Gift.

No biblical, logical, or practical reason exists that God would withdraw the gift of tongues from the Church. The reasons why Paul thanked God that he spoke in tongues are the same reasons all believers today should thank God for the baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues.