

TONGUES

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit...divers kinds of tongues... (I Corinthians 12:7-10)

The gift of tongues is the ability to receive and communicate a message of God to His people through a language never learned. "Tongues" means languages. The reason we have called this a "sign" gift rather than a "speaking" gift is that the Bible indicates clearly that this gift is given for a sign.

When one speaks in tongues it can be in a language known and recognized by the listeners:

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language...

And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born. (Acts 2:6-8)

It can also be in a language not known to man. This is called speaking in unknown tongues:

For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the Spirit he speaketh mysteries. (I Corinthians 14:2)

As you previously learned, speaking in tongues is the physical sign of having been baptized in the Holy Spirit. But this experience of speaking in tongues is different from the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues is the special ability to deliver messages from God to the church in a language not known by the speaker.

The purposes of speaking in tongues, both as a sign of baptism in the Holy Spirit and the gift of tongues are for:

Prayer to God: I Corinthians 14:2

Self edification: I Corinthians 14:4. Edification is not exalting self, but means encouragement, improvement, and development. Isaiah 28:11-12 also calls it spiritual refreshing.

Intercession: The Holy Spirit speaks through the believer in an unknown tongue to intercede in prayer. The word "intercede" means to pray on behalf of another. The Holy Spirit knows just how and for what to pray. I Corinthians 14:14. See also Romans 8:26,27

Praise: Acts 10:46; I Corinthians 14:15

Fulfillment of prophecy: I Corinthians 14:21; Isaiah 28:11-12

But the gift of tongues has two additional purposes. When a person with the gift of tongues gives a message to the church assembly and this message is interpreted it is for...

Edification of the church: I Corinthians 14:12-13

A sign to unbelievers: I Corinthians 14:22. This is why the gift of tongues and the interpretation which should accompany use of this gift are called "sign gifts".

There are specific guidelines given for using the gift of tongues in the church:

1. Not everyone is to speak at one time: I Corinthians 12:30
2. To edify the church, the gift of tongues must be accompanied by interpretation so the listeners will understand what is said: I Corinthians 14:1-5
3. Because of this, a believer with the gift of tongues should keep quiet if there is no interpreter: I Corinthians 14:28
4. He should also pray for the gift of interpretation himself: I Corinthians 12:13
5. In the church it is more important to speak in language understood than tongues if no interpreter is present: I Corinthians 14:18-19
6. Only one person should interpret at a time: I Corinthians 14:27
7. A person with the gift of tongues can control it: I Corinthians 14:32-33
8. Speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden: I Corinthians 14:39-40
9. The most important thing is order in the church services. There should be no confusion caused by this or any other gift: I Corinthians 14:40