

HOW TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF TONGUES?

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God doesn't give us a manual on the gifts of the Spirit. He gives us history, the experiences of people interacting with God, and theology, the explanation of those experiences. So to understand and receive gifts of the Spirit, we look both at people's experiences and the Bible's explanations.

We need to demystify the gifts of the Spirit to make them more accessible to us. When people with mature prophetic gifts used to come to our conferences, they would call out people and give them spot-on messages, to the amazement of listeners. But the response in their hearts was, "I could never do that." That is, until we began bringing prophetically gifted people with a greater desire to release the gift than to exercise it. When they taught people how to do it rather than simply demonstrating it, and even gave them experiences to practice it, the people (including my children!) said, "I could do that." The gift of prophecy was no longer for the elite but for the elect!

To demystify the gift of tongues, we need to *know* something and *do* something. Jesus is the divine-human Savior. He isn't half of one and half of the other. He is fully God and fully Man. In like manner, the Bible is a divine-human book. As a divine book it is the message of God to humanity. It is without error because God is not subject to error. We are told that "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). But it is also a human book. The personality of Luke is revealed in the books he wrote. And a different personality and style are revealed in John's writing. The Bible is not so divine as to obliterate the individualities of the authors.

In the same way, the gifts of the Spirit are divine and human. They are divine in that those who exercise them are revealing the Holy Spirit, not themselves. Paul says that "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given..." (I Corinthians 12:6). Peter writes that "if anyone speaks [prophecy], he should do it as one speaking the very words of God..." (I Peter 4:11).

But the gifts are also human. The Holy Spirit does not speak in tongues—people do: "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (Acts 2:4). Paul tells us that "if a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith" (Romans 12:6), suggesting that the gift matures as faith grows. We have a part to play. Faith has lips and legs; it says something and does something. We are called co-workers with God, and we see this clearly in the exercise of spiritual gifts. We are people of faith, not of fate. Fate says, "Whatever will be will be," while faith makes us participants, not robots of the arbitrary and ironclad will of a distant deity. We actually make a difference.

And this affects not only how we exercise the gifts but also how we receive them. Our very desire has something to do with what we receive; otherwise Paul would not tell us twice to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts" (I Cor. 12:31; 14:1). There is a beautiful dance between heaven and earth, and our desires are not incompatible with divine will. The Spirit gives the gifts as He determines (I Corinthians 12:11), but our pursuit of the gifts is factored into the plans of the Almighty. So rather than saying, "I'm open to whatever God wants to give me," a more appropriate and biblical response would be, "I am eager for the gifts of the Spirit, and I really want to prophesy."

So I encourage people to take steps of faith in receiving the gift of tongues, not to sit passively with their mouths shut. My experience is that when people open their mouths and

begin to speak words while at the same time shutting down their native language, God takes those sounds and turns them into a language. People sometimes ask, "What words and what sounds?" My response: "It doesn't matter. Be a child and babble if you must. That is expressing faith in a God who wants to give you the gift of tongues."

It is not uncommon for God to ask us to make the first move. He told the priests to step into the water when they were carrying the ark, and when they did, the waters would part (Joshua 3). Had they said, "We're not moving until the waters recede," their passivity would have cancelled out the miracle. In like manner, our passivity with regard to the gift of tongues may preclude our receiving it.

We are not offending God nor blaspheming the Spirit, as some might think, by trying. When a child attempts to walk and fails, the family standing by cheers on the struggling infant. When we make attempts at what we understand to be the will of God, rather than insulting Him, we are blessing Him. James wrote, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (4:8). In other words, take the first step of faith, and watch God take a step. Don't wait silently until God does something, or you might be waiting at the riverbank a long time. This is not a time for passivity but for eager desire that motivates action. Faith pleases God. Opening our mouths and uttering something (anything), rather than testing the God who offers the gifts, is reaching up to receive what the generous heart of the Father chooses to give.

"Faith without works is dead" (James 2:17), and dead faith is no faith. The greatest block to receiving tongues is passivity, just like one of the greatest hindrances to faith is non-activity. The part we play with the gift of healing may be to ask a friend if we can pray for him or to stretch out our hand and touch someone's sore shoulder. Our part in the gift of prophecy is to open our mouths and speak the words that God begins to put into our mind. Our part in receiving tongues is to open our mouths and begin speaking unintelligible words. As we do, we are trusting the Gift-giver to turn it into a language of praise. And millions of people could testify that He does just that!