

# **The Four Types of Tongues**

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# The Four Types of Tongues

## Introduction

Speaking in tongues is evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had predicted that believers will speak with new tongues (Mark 16:17). Tongues first occurred when the Holy Spirit came down on the 120 men and women in the upper room on Pentecost: **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.** (Acts 2:4)

When Peter was preaching to a gathering of Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, tongues were the audible sign that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on them: **While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God** (Acts 10:44-46). Peter refers back to this event in Acts 11:15-16 and confirms that tongues were the sign that the Gentiles had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit: **And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he used to say, "John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."**

The baptism with the Holy Spirit is so crucial to Christianity that the apostles Paul, Peter, and John verified whether new believers had received it (Acts 8:14-17; Acts 19:1-7). When Paul was in Ephesus, he discovered that the new believers had not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They had not even heard that the Holy Spirit existed: **And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.** (Acts 19:6)

Scripture mentions four different types of tongues: first of all, tongues for personal edification; secondly, tongues with interpretation for the church; thirdly, tongues for evangelism; and fourthly, spiritual groanings for deep intercession. The characteristics of all four types are distinctly different, and so are the rules that apply to them. Paul's instructions on tongues will seem contradictory unless they are correctly classified.

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1) Credit for this classification goes to Dave Roberson's "The Walk of the Spirit -The Walk of Power".

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## Tongues for Personal Edification

The first and most common manifestation of tongues is the personal prayer language of the believer for self-edification. It is the personal prayer language of the believer besides his or her natural language. Paul says, "So what shall I do? **I will pray with my spirit**, but I will also pray with my understanding; **I will sing with my spirit**, but I will also sing with my understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15). Praying with the spirit refers to praying in tongues, while praying with our understanding refers to praying in our natural language.

**For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; ... Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies himself ...** (1 Corinthians 14:2+4) When we pray in tongues, we build ourselves up spiritually. 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) This personal prayer language is a very important gift for the effective spiritual edification of the believer. This is why the apostle Paul spoke in tongues extensively: **"I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all."** (1 Corinthians 14:18)

It is God's design that the believer praying in tongues does not understand what he or she is praying. **For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays**, but my mind is unfruitful. (1 Corinthians 14:14) Praying in tongues purposefully bypasses our mind, our natural understanding. When we speak in tongues, we speak spiritual mysteries. **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)

Tongues for personal edification are for all believers at all times. Jesus predicted that those who believe will speak in tongues: **And these signs will accompany those who believe:** In my name they will drive out demons; **they will speak in new tongues**; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:17-18)

Peter announced on Pentecost: **"... you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off - for all whom the Lord our God will call."** (Acts 2:38+39). Accordingly, Paul wants every believer to speak in tongues for personal edification: **"I wish you all spoke in tongues ..."** (1 Corinthians 14:5)

Tongues for self-edification must be differentiated from the ministry gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11. The gift of tongues for personal edification is not for the church but

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for the individual believer. We usually pray in tongues when we are alone with God or silently when in public. Paul did not recommend speaking in tongues for self-edification in a public gathering: **So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?** (1 Corinthians 14:23, NIV).

Speaking in tongues for personal edification is the only manifestation of tongues that a believer can flow in at any time he or she chooses. Next to reading the Word of God, it is a very effective means to build ourselves up spiritually.

## Tongues for the Edification of the Church

Tongues for the edification of the church must be followed by their interpretation into the natural language spoken by the congregation. Tongues with interpretation are a prophetic gift of the Holy Spirit. The prophecy is given in tongues, which are heavenly languages unknown to man. Therefore, the prophecy in tongues must be interpreted into a natural language so the church can understand it and be edified. **But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.** (1 Corinthians 12:7+10) Tongues with interpretation are vocal utterances within a corporate church gathering.

Tongues with interpretation are two of the nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11. These spiritual gifts are given for the edification of the church. Paul said, "Now I wish you all spoke in tongues, but rather that you would prophesy; and **greater is the one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edification.**" (1 Corinthians 14:5, NASB) Paul wants all believers to speak in tongues for personal edification. He wants them even more to prophecy or move in the gift of tongues with interpretation so that the church can be edified. That is why he says, "Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue is to pray that he may interpret." (1 Corinthians 14:13) Paul commands us to desire the spiritual gifts - especially prophecy - earnestly because he always has the edification of the church on his mind (1 Corinthians 14:1; 1 Corinthians 14:12).

Contrary to speaking in tongues for self-edification, this second manifestation cannot be voluntarily turned on by the believer. **But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as he wills.** (1 Corinthians 12:11) The Holy Spirit determines what kind of spiritual gift flows through which believer at any given time. Paul asks a rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30, "Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" The implicit answer is no. Not all believers operate in the spiritual gifts of

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tongues or the interpretation of tongues, but all are called to speak in tongues for personal edification.

## Tongues for Evangelism

The third manifestation of tongues is for evangelism. In this case, the believer is speaking a natural language he or she has no natural knowledge of. This, in turn, is a sign to unbelievers: **So then, tongues are for a sign not to those who believe but to unbelievers.** (1 Corinthians 14:22) This happens when a believer speaks words given by the Holy Spirit that he or she does not understand, and those words are in a natural language directed towards an audience speaking that specific language.

This is what happened first on the day of Pentecost. When they poured into the streets of Jerusalem, the 120 men and women spoke in different natural languages they had never learned. **And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues as the Spirit was giving them ability to speak out (Acts 2:4).** Now there were Jews residing in Jerusalem, devout men from every language under heaven. **And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and they were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.** They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why - are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?** Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs - **we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty deeds of God.**" (Acts 2:5-11)

The manifestation of tongues that came down on Pentecost was neither for self-edification nor for the edification of the church. These tongues were for evangelism. They were a mighty sign to the unbelievers. Men and women from Galilee proclaimed the mighty deeds of God in at least fifteen natural languages they had never learned. This third manifestation of tongues enables a believer to testify, teach, and preach in a natural language of which he or she has no previous knowledge.

## Groanings for Deep Intercession

The essence of tongues is speaking as the Holy Spirit enables; he provides the utterance (Acts 2:4). Groanings are not tongues in the sense of spiritual words spoken, but they are a vocal utterance birthed by the Holy Spirit. They are a form of deep intercession prompted by the Holy Spirit. This intercession is not expressed in words but in groaning

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sounds. It is a deep cry to God that can sound similar to the groanings of a woman in labor pains. These groanings are accompanied by a deep sense of compassion and urgency, such as when crying out for the lost or God's intervention in a life-or-death situation.

**Now, in the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and he who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)** We see this type of compassion and groaning before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead: **When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled (John 11:33, NKJV).** The NIV and the NASB translations say that Jesus was deeply moved and troubled.

Spiritual groaning is a gift of the Holy Spirit for deep intercession. The believer may or may not know who or what he or she is contending for. This type of birthing intercession occurs during personal prayer or corporate intercession. Groaning in the flesh must not be confounded with genuine spiritual groaning.

## Summary

The baptism of the Holy Spirit brings four different kinds of tongues (**1 Corinthians 14:2-4; 1 Corinthians 12:7-10; Acts 2:5-11; Romans 8:26-27**), the bold proclamation of the gospel (**Acts 2:11**), prophesying (**Acts 19:6**), and exuberant praise (**Acts 10:46**). The essence of all these manifestations is speaking as the Holy Spirit enables and gives the utterance (**Acts 2:4**). The finished work of the cross and the outpouring, indwelling, and ministry of the Holy Spirit are the essence of the New Covenant. We must neither quench the Holy Spirit (**1 Thessalonians 5:19**) nor forbid the speaking in tongues (**1 Corinthians 14:39**).

**All glory to Jesus.**