

# Is Speaking in Tongues Biblical?

A Short FAQ Handout

## Main Point

The Bible teaches that speaking in tongues is a legitimate spiritual gift. At the same time, Scripture teaches that spiritual gifts must operate:

- in love
- in order
- for edification
- under the authority of Scripture

The goal of Christianity is not merely spiritual experiences, but transformation into the image of Christ.

## 1. Does Tongues Always Need to Be Interpreted?

**No, not necessarily.**

### Public Tongues Require Interpretation

**1 Corinthians 14:27** — “If any speak in a tongue... let someone interpret.”

Paul’s concern is:

- clarity
- order
- edification of the church

### Private Prayer Tongues May Not Require Interpretation

- **1 Corinthians 14:2** — “One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God.”
- **1 Corinthians 14:14** — “My spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful.”

This appears to describe prayer directed toward God rather than public instruction.

## 2. Isn’t Tongues Just Supernaturally Speaking Human Languages?

**Sometimes Yes**

**Acts 2:4–11** — At Pentecost, the disciples spoke recognizable human languages.

**But 1 Corinthians Appears Broader**

- **1 Corinthians 14:2** — “No one understands him...”
- **1 Corinthians 13:1** — “Tongues of men and of angels...”

Scripture appears to leave room for:

- human languages

- heavenly/angelic speech
- prayer language
- spiritual utterance beyond ordinary speech

### 3. Are All Christians Gifted with Tongues?

**No**

**1 Corinthians 12:29–30** — “Do all speak with tongues?”

**Implied answer:** No.

**1 Corinthians 12:11** — “The Spirit apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

### 4. Are Tongues the Sign of Salvation / New Birth?

**Scripture Never Says This**

No verse says:

- “You must speak in tongues to be saved.”
- “Tongues are the universal evidence of salvation.”

What Scripture Emphasizes Instead

- **Acts 15:8–9** — “Having cleansed their hearts by faith.”
- **Galatians 5:22–23** — The fruit of the Spirit:

The New Testament emphasizes that the evidence of the Spirit’s work are:

- transformed hearts
- holiness
- Christlike living

### 5. Are “Tongues” and a “Prayer Language” the Same Thing?

**Not Exactly**

The New Testament appears to distinguish between:

- public tongues
- and private prayer in tongues

#### Prayer Language

**1 Corinthians 14:2** — “Speaks not to men but to God.”

This appears:

- personal
- devotional
- vertical

## Public Tongues

**1 Corinthians 14:5** — “...unless someone interprets...”

Public tongues:

- are for the church
- require interpretation
- function differently than private prayer

## 6. Is Tongues an Intelligible Language or Just “Jibberish”?

### Scripture Leaves Some Mystery Here

**Acts 2** — Pentecost clearly involved recognizable languages.

But Paul Also Describes Tongues as Mysterious

- **1 Corinthians 14:2** — “He utters mysteries in the Spirit.”
- **1 Corinthians 14:14** — “My mind is unfruitful.”
- **1 Corinthians 13:1** — “Tongues of angels...”

This suggests tongues may:

- transcend ordinary rational language
- express spiritual realities beyond normal speech

## 7. Does Scripture Prohibit Someone from Interpreting their Own Tongues?

**No — the Bible does not explicitly prohibit someone from interpreting their own tongue. In fact, 1 Corinthians 14 may actually imply that this can happen.**

**1 Corinthians 14:13** — “Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret.”

That verse is significant because:

- the speaker in tongues is the subject
- Paul tells the tongue-speaker to pray for interpretation

That naturally suggests the possibility that:

- the same person who gives the tongue
- may also receive the interpretation

Paul never says: “Someone else must interpret.”

He only says: “Let someone interpret” (1 Cor. 14:27) which leaves the identity of the interpreter open.

So biblically speaking:

- self-interpretation is not forbidden

- and may actually be envisioned by Paul

## Important Pastoral Considerations

Even if self-interpretation is permissible, Paul's overarching concerns remain:

- order
- edification
- discernment
- humility

So churches should still:

- exercise wisdom
- avoid spectacle
- avoid manipulative behavior
- test everything

## Important Balance

The Bible teaches:

- tongues are biblical
- tongues should not be forbidden
- not everyone has the gift
- gifts do not equal spiritual maturity
- worship must remain orderly
- transformation matters more than experiences

## Key Scriptures

- **1 Corinthians 14:39–40** — “Do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.”
- **Galatians 5:22–23** — “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...”
- **Romans 8:29** — “To be conformed to the image of his Son.”