

What Does the Bible Teach about Speaking in Tongues?

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

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1 Corinthians 14:19 Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

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1 Corinthians 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

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1. The need to learn what the *Bible* says on the matter of speaking in tongues is important for three reasons.
 - First, speaking in tongue is a biblical issue and so as part of the Word of God is profitable for study. *2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*
 - Second, because there is a widespread difference of opinion, separating earnest, Bible-believing Christians the matter of speaking in tongues ought to be studied in order to understand one another.
 - Third, speaking in tongues should be studied because many people are seeking for a sensational experience instead of seeking for the power of the Holy Spirit to win souls.
2. The reason many seek to speak with tongues is because they have been misled into believing that such an experience is the primary evidence of being Spirit filled when it is not.
3. The filling of the Holy Spirit is manifested in different ways.

- **In the lives of those who worked on the Tabernacle in the Wilderness being filled with the Holy Spirit meant an ability to construct a perfect place of worship for the Lord.** *Ex 28:3 And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office.*
- **In the life of John the Baptist being filled with the Holy Spirit was revealed in a holy and separate life.** *Luke 1:15 For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*
- **In the life of Elisabeth being filled with the Holy Spirit produced a song of praise.** *Luke 1:41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*
- **In the life of Zacharias being filled with the Holy Ghost manifested itself in an act of prophecy.** *Luke 1:67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,*
- **On the day of Pentecost being filled with the Holy Ghost produced effective preaching and the salvation of souls.** *Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2: 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*
- **When the early Christians received the filling of the Holy Ghost they enjoyed an effective prayer life.** *Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*
- **When Saul of Tarsus received the gift of the filling of the Holy Spirit he became an effective communicator of the gospel and was bold in denouncing sin.** *Acts 9:17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Acts 13:9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10 And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*

4. Every believer is commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit, which means being Spirit filled is not an extra option nor is it an experience for a select few especially spiritual people. A life filled with the Holy Spirit is the normal Christian life.
 - *Ephesians 5:18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*
5. One of the most important passages on the tongues question is found in Acts 2:1-11.
6. The reason why this passage is crucial is because the giving of the gift of tongues on the Day of Pentecost was in association with world evangelism following the ascension of Christ.
7. No less than sixteen different nationalities are named as hearing in their own tongues the wonderful works of God.
 - Parthians
 - Medes
 - Elamites
 - The dwellers in Mesopotamia
 - The dwellers in Judaea
 - Cappadocia
 - Pontus
 - Asia
 - Phrygia
 - Pamphylia
 - Egypt
 - Libya
 - Cyrene
 - Strangers of Rome
 - Jews and proselytes
 - Cretes
 - Arabians
8. Furthermore, the passage in Acts 2 is crucial for understanding the tongues question because more verses are used to describe how Christians spoke so many languages by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - In Mark 16:17 only one verse mentions speaking in tongues.
 - In Acts 10:46 only one verse mentions speaking in tongues at the house of Cornelius.
 - In Acts 19:6 only one verse mentions speaking in tongues with the disciples of Ephesus.
 - In 1 Corinthians only twenty words in four phrases deal with the tongues question.

- In 1 Corinthians 14 no particular instance is given of tongues and most of the chapter is spent reproving a heresy about tongues.

Only in Acts 2:4-11 is there a clear description of speaking in tongues with the power and approval of God and what it meant.

Only in Acts 2:1-11 is there a clear account of the *miraculous* gift of tongues.

9. In Acts 10:46 we are told that Peter and the six Jews who went with him to the house of Cornelius heard this household of the Italian band “*speak with tongues, and magnify God.*” But since the word “*tongues*” here simply means languages, it is very possible that Cornelius and his household simply gave their testimony to salvation and praise to God in both the Latin and the Aramaic languages. They could have done this without any special gift of tongues.
10. In like manner in Acts 19:6 the Bible simply states that some twelve men at Ephesus “*spoke with tongues, and prophesied.*” They were certainly natural languages and the languages may have been learned as people study and learn languages today. The Bible does not say that it was the miraculous gift of tongues.
11. No one can comprehend the miraculous gift of tongues except by seeing what happened at Pentecost.
12. What happened at Pentecost is simple and profound. The Spirit filled Christians at Pentecost witnessed for Christ in sixteen different languages. There were no “spiritual” languages or “heavenly” utterances. The languages used were normal, human languages. There was no babble of sound unfamiliar to any human mind.
13. The word translated “*tongues*” in Acts 2:4 is the Greek word “*glossa.*” It is used in the New Testament fifty times.
 - Sixteen times it refers to the literal human organ in the mouth.
 - Once, in Acts 2:3, it is used of “cloven tongues like as of fire” much like the flame of a candle form a shape like the tongue.
 - All the other times it means languages as in Revelation 5:9 where people are referred to “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”
14. Not one time in the Bible does the word “*tongues*” or “*glossa*” means something mysterious, a language unknown to some group of mankind.
15. With this in mind a return can be made to the household of Cornelius to let *Scripture* interpret *Scripture*. Peter related in Acts 11:15 how God gave to Cornelius and his household the gift of the Holy Spirit. They then spoke in some language or languages (Italian, Syria, Aramaic, Latin, or Greek) words that glorified God.

16. Turning to 1 Corinthians 14 Paul rebukes the misuse of normal human languages among the Christians at Corinth. Keep in mind the word “unknown” is not in the Greek in this passage.

1 Corinthians 14:2-4 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. 3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort. 4 He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.

17. This passage simply teaches that if a man speaks in the church in a foreign language, God understands him but men do not. He may be saying something good but it does not matter if the language used is a foreign language that the people present do not comprehend.

18. Understanding the importance of clarity in gospel preaching takes the student back to Pentecost for there the only way there could be clarity was to speak in tongues or new languages for a mixed multitude had gathered. In Corinth the only way to have clarity of the gospel was not to speak in tongues or new languages. A principle is established: What may be right in one place can be wrong in another.

19. At Pentecost the gift of languages was needed because the Jewish festival brought strangers to the city from many places. And so tongues was given in order to communicate to unsaved people they needed a Saviour.

20. The gift of tongues was not given to give the disciples a religious ecstasy or joy or spiritual frenzy. Nothing like that is inferred from Scripture. There was no “*falling under the power*” or being in a trance. The filling of the Holy Ghost and the ability to speak in other languages meant the gospel could be preached and souls could be saved.

21. Unless the gospel is communicated in a known language speaking in tongues is utterly profitless. Paul makes this truth known in 1 Corinthians 14:6-9.

1 Corinthians 14:6-9 Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? 7 And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? 8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.

22. Paul is teaching here that when there is no practical reason for speaking in a foreign language it should be omitted. If the gift of tongues was designed for selfish purposes, for personal joy or in order to experience ecstatic, unintelligible rhapsodies that would certainly be commended at this point. It is not.

23. Thus we see the meaning of speaking in tongues in the Bible. It was a miraculous gift provided on limited occasions to be used a sign to unbelievers. Only three particular cases of speaking in tongues are mentioned in the Bible and only one was certainly miraculous. The gift of tongues was not a personal ecstasy or a rhapsody but a means by which the gospel could be effectively communicated.
24. Despite these concepts clearly revealed in *Scripture* the teaching of the Pentecostal movement is that speaking with other tongues is *the* initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
25. This doctrinal position is not embraced because of any plain categorical statement in Scripture to that effect but to deductive reasoning. In other words a major doctrine is asserted rather than clearly revealed. The Bible nowhere says that speaking in tongues is the Biblical evidence or the initial evidence of having received the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
26. This is a major problem and falls into the same category of Arguments from Silence that other errors are placed such as the following:
- The age of accountability being twelve.
 - Purgatory
 - The Rapture
 - A coming seven year tribulation period
 - The rise of a one world government
 - Infant baptism
 - The perpetual virginity of Mary
 - The prohibition of marriage by ministers
 - The eating of meat on Friday
 - The unpardonable sin being rejecting Christ as Savior
 - Speaking in tongues being the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit
27. The *Bible* clearly commands Christians to be filled with the Spirit. *Ephesians 5:18* *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.* The *Bible* does not clearly command Christians to speak in tongues. If speaking in tongues was the initial evidence of being filled with the Spirit as the doctrinal position states then most Christians, among them the most spiritual of all.
- Charles Spurgeon
 - D. L. Moody
 - Charles G. Finney
 - John Calvin
 - Augustine
 - Billy Graham

- George Whitefield
- John and Charles Wesley
- R. A. Torrey
- J. Wilbur Chapman
- Billy Sunday
- George W. Truett
- Gipsy Smith
- Bob Jones
- Hyman Appleman
- Charles Fuller
- Robert G. Lee
- Lee Roberson
- John the Baptist (Luke 1:15, 16)
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17)
- The converts in Samaria (Acts 8:14-17) and Jesus Himself (Luke 4:1; 4:21) etc. have never been obedient to this gospel duty for they never spoke in tongues.

In the cases of John, Jesus, the Samaritan Christians and Saul the first time they were filled with the Spirit is mentioned and in none of these instances did they speak in tongues.

Moreover, Stephen was filled with the Spirit but did not speak in tongues.

Acts 6:5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost...

Barnabas was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Acts 11:24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

28. The sign of being filled with the Holy Spirit is not tongues but spiritual power for effective soul winning. Notice the language of Christ.

- *Luke 24:49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*
- *Acts 1:4-5 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

- *Acts 2:37-41 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

The conversion of souls was *the* evidence of the power that had come to the disciples. It is the power of Pentecost the church needs. It is the power of Pentecost the church can have provided there is an expectant waiting on God with holiness of heart and humbleness in prayer.