

THE THREE MODES OF TONGUES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE FOR TODAY



A Oneness Apostolic Perspective on Speaking in Tongues
And Refuting the Modern Philosophical Misconceptions

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The Three Modes of Tongues in the New Testament

A KJV-Based Study on the Distinctions Paul Never Blends

Introduction

Tongues are essential to salvation

In the historic Apostolic Church, speaking in tongues was not treated as an optional experience but as the consistent outward sign of receiving the Holy Ghost, which is essential to salvation. Jesus Himself declared, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5), and the apostles understood that new birth to include the infilling of the Spirit evidenced by tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:44–46; 19:6). Paul makes it clear that salvation is impossible without the Spirit: “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9), and it is that same Spirit that will raise us from the dead (Rom. 8:11). Humanity cannot raise itself; it is the indwelling Holy Ghost that brings life. Yet despite this consistent apostolic pattern, most modern denominations reduce tongues to an optional gift that separates them from salvation, or deny that tongues are for today, entirely. With that in mind, the following are the most common objections raised against speaking in tongues:

1. “Tongues were only real languages (Acts 2)”

They argue that biblical tongues were always known human languages used for evangelism, not unknown or spiritual utterances, and therefore modern “tongues” are unbiblical.

2. “Tongues have ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8)”

This is the classic cessationist argument—that tongues were a temporary gift for the early church and ended once the New Testament was completed or the church was established.

3. “Not everyone has the gift of tongues”

They appeal to 1 Corinthians 12:30 (“Do all speak with tongues?”) and argue that tongues are only for some believers, not something all Christians should experience.

4. “Tongues without interpretation are forbidden”

Based on 1 Corinthians 14, they argue that since most modern tongues are not interpreted, they violate Scripture and therefore cannot be from God.

5. “Tongues cause confusion, and God is not the author of confusion”

They point to disorder in some services and claim that chaotic or emotional displays prove that modern tongues are not biblical.

6. “Tongues were a sign for unbelieving Jews only”

Using 1 Corinthians 14:21–22, they argue tongues were specifically a sign of judgment to Israel and therefore have no ongoing purpose today.

7. “Modern tongues are psychological or learned behavior”

Some claim that modern glossolalia is emotionalism, imitation, or even neurological patterns rather than a supernatural gift of the Spirit.

All seven objections collapse when Scripture is allowed to define tongues instead of forcing all occurrences into a single category. These false assumptions all arise from one single root cause: people do not understand the multiple modes of tongues that are essential to Apostolic church function and salvation. There is no clear example in Acts where the Holy Ghost is received without accompanying evidence, and in every explicit instance, that evidence is speaking in tongues.

Any church or doctrine that rejects the essentiality of tongues rejects the source of tongues: the Holy Ghost. Rejection of the Holy Ghost (who is the Spirit of Jesus Christ), is actually putting Jesus out of the church and **not allowing Him to reign, minister, and operate** within the very church they call Christ’s. The evidence of this sad reality is that these churches are dull and dry, and lacking all power, anointing, miracles, and the manifest presence of God.

Three distinct Modes

The subject of speaking in tongues is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in modern Christianity. Yet when we approach the Scriptures honestly—especially in the King James Version—it becomes unmistakably clear that the New Testament describes **three distinct modes** of tongues. Paul never conflates them in function, and Luke never confuses them in narrative—each mode operates with distinct purpose, context, and instruction.

These modes are:

1. **Tongues as the sign of receiving the Holy Ghost**
2. **The spiritual gift of tongues for public edification**
3. **Praying in tongues in personal devotion, privately or in the church**

Let us examine these carefully and scripturally.

1. Tongues as the Sign of Receiving the Holy Ghost

(Acts 2, Acts 10, Acts 19 — the evidential sign)

The first mode of tongues appears in the Book of Acts as the **initial sign** of Spirit infilling. At Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was poured out for the first time, Luke writes:

“And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, **and began to speak with other tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

— **Acts 2:4 (KJV)**

This was not the “gift of tongues,” nor devotional prayer. This was the **first-time evidence** that the promised Spirit had entered the believer. This same pattern repeats throughout Acts:

Cornelius and his household

“For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.”

— **Acts 10:46 (KJV)**

Peter confidently recognized their Spirit baptism without instruction or examination—*because* he heard tongues—clear proof this was not a one-time Pentecost phenomenon.

The disciples at Ephesus

“And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.”

— **Acts 19:6 (KJV)**

In all cases:

- The tongues are **signs**, not gifts.
- They accompany **initial Spirit reception**.
- They are not for public interpretation.
- No interpretation is given or expected.

In Scripture, this mode appears only in connection with the initial reception of the Holy Ghost and is never presented as recurring after that moment. Once received, the other two modes may follow—but this first mode is foundational.

2. The Gift of Tongues

(1 Corinthians 12–14 — for the church body)

The second mode of tongues is a **spiritual gift** given selectively within the church, functioning similarly to prophecy, wisdom, or healing. Paul distinguishes it clearly:

“To another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.”

— **1 Corinthians 12:10 (KJV)**

This “gift of tongues” is:

- Not given to every believer (1 Cor. 12:29–30)
- Not the sign of Spirit reception
- For **public edification**
- Always paired with **interpretation**
- Operates decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:27–28)

Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 apply to **this mode only**—never to prayer tongues or salvation evidence. That distinction is critical. When Paul says:

“If there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church.”

— **1 Corinthians 14:28 (KJV)**

He is speaking of the **public gift**, not the believer's prayer language and not the sign of receiving the Holy Ghost.

This mode builds up the body as God speaks through a vessel to deliver a message requiring interpretation.

3. Praying in Tongues

(1 Corinthians 14:2, 4, 14–15 — personal edification)

The third mode is **praying in the Spirit**, a regular devotional practice for Spirit-filled believers. Paul writes:

“For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God...”

— **1 Corinthians 14:2 (KJV)**

This is **not** the gift of tongues, because the message is not to the congregation but *to God*. No interpretation is needed. Paul continues:

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself...”

— **1 Corinthians 14:4 (KJV)**

This is private strengthening—spiritual edification, refreshing, and communion with God. And again:

“For if I pray in an unknown tongue, **my spirit prayeth**, but my understanding is unfruitful.”

— **1 Corinthians 14:14 (KJV)**

Paul describes this as a regular discipline, not an occasional gift:

“I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all.”

— **1 Corinthians 14:18 (KJV)**

“I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

— 1 Corinthians 14:15 (KJV)

This is the personal prayer mode—used often, not requiring a church service, and distinct from tongues as a sign or a gift.

Three Distinct Purposes, One Spirit Working All

These modes never overlap in Scripture and are never treated as interchangeable.

How the Bible Categorizes Tongues

THE THREE MODES OF TONGUES

A KJV-Based Biblical Distinction in the New Testament

One Spirit. Three Modes. Three Purposes.

1.



Tongues as the Sign of Receiving the Holy Ghost

- Initial evidence of Spirit infilling
- Occurs when believers first receive the Holy Ghost
- Not the gift of tongues
- No interpretation required
- For all who receive the Holy Ghost



Key Scriptures: Acts 2:4 • Acts 10:44–46 • Acts 19:6

Purpose: **Evidential Sign**

2.



The Gift of Tongues

- A spiritual gift operating in the church
- Not given to every believer
- Used for public edification
- Must be accompanied by interpretation
- Operates decently and in order



Key Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 12:10 • 12:29–30 • 14:27–28

Purpose: **Public Edification**

3.



Praying in Tongues

- Personal prayer and communion with God
- Speaks not unto men, but unto God
- Edifies the believer personally
- No interpretation required
- For Spirit-filled believers



Key Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 14:2 • 14:4 • 14:14–15 • 14:18

Purpose: **Personal Edification**

How the Bible Categorizes Tongues

	 Sign of Receiving the Holy Ghost	 Gift of Tongues	 Praying in Tongues
 Purpose:	Initial evidence	Public message	Personal devotion
 Interpretation:	No	Yes	No
 For Everyone?:	Yes	No	Yes (Spirit-filled believers)

Paul never blends the three modes—each has its own purpose, context, and instruction.

Paul's writings make it plain:

- He **never** tells believers to avoid praying in tongues.
 - He **never** says the gift replaces the sign.
 - He **never** merges the three.
 - He treats each with clarity and purpose.
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Conclusion: A Balanced, Biblical View of Tongues

When we honor the distinctions the New Testament gives us, confusion disappears and order returns to our understanding. Tongues are not chaotic or mysterious when read carefully in the KJV:

- At **salvation**, tongues are the supernatural sign that the Holy Ghost has arrived.
- In **the church**, tongues function as a gift accompanied by interpretation.
- In **prayer**, tongues release spiritual strength, intercession, worship, and communion with God.

One Spirit. Three modes. Three purposes. No contradictions—only clarity when Scripture is allowed to speak for itself.

Addendum: Have Tongues Ceased?

The claim that tongues have ceased is not supported by Scripture but is instead built upon assumptions imposed on the text. The primary passage used is 1 Corinthians 13:8, where Paul says, *“whether there be tongues, they shall cease.”* However, Paul also states that knowledge will vanish, and prophecy will fail—yet no one argues that knowledge has already ceased. The timing is clearly defined: *“when that which is perfect is come”* (1 Cor. 13:10), which Paul later identifies as the time when we see *“face to face”* (v.12). This is not the completion of the New Testament, but the return of Christ.

Furthermore, the New Testament never teaches that tongues would cease during the church age. Instead, they are presented as part of the normal operation of the Spirit in the church (1 Cor. 12–14), and there is no passage that revokes or limits their duration. Peter declared at Pentecost that the promise of the Spirit was *“unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call”* (Acts 2:39), extending beyond the first generation.

If tongues were meant to cease, Scripture would state it plainly. Instead, what we find is continuity, promise, and ongoing purpose. The burden of proof does not lie on those who believe tongues continue, but on those who claim they have ended—without any explicit biblical declaration.

Final Word

This is one of the defining distinctions of Apostolic faith. We embrace the Book of Acts as the blueprint for the New Testament Church—we do not explain it away because it is uncomfortable or difficult to understand. As Apostolics, we accept the Scriptures as they are written, not as they are reinterpreted to fit modern preferences. When we receive the Word by faith, we do not merely study doctrine—we witness the tangible manifestation of Jesus Christ and His Spirit in our midst, just as the Book of Acts records.