

Cliff Notes on the Biblical Understanding of Tongues

There are 5 passages that refer directly to the tongues in the New Testament:
Mark 16:15-20; Acts 2:1-13; Acts 10:39-48; Acts 19:1-10; 1 Corinthians 12-14

There are 3 major views on what the Bible teaches on tongues. Obviously, this is overly simplistic in an attempt to synthesize different understandings.

Issue	Propagating View	Permissive View	Prohibitive View
Sound Byte	"Everyone Should"	"Some May"	"It's Done"
Overview	Tongues is seen as evidence of the Holy Spirit, and everyone should want to have this experience.	Tongues is seen as a gift given to some and is not necessarily available to all.	Tongues is seen as having ceased and is therefore not to be practiced today.
Nature	Tongues is mainly ecstatic utterances - with the possibility (although rare) that it was a known language.	Tongues is both a known language and ecstatic utterances.	Tongues is a known language. If there is any evidence of prayer language it too has ceased.
Interpretation	Acts is normative for all believers for all time. 1 Cor. 12-14 is seen as helpful.	Acts is Historical: 1 Cor. 12-14 is seen as normative.	Acts is Historical: 1 Cor. 12-14 is seen through 1 Cor. 13:8.
Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Seen as distinct from conversion.	Seen as simultaneous to conversion.	Seen as simultaneous to conversion.
Purpose of Tongues	To validate the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.	It is gift given to some to demonstrate the diversity of the Body of Christ.	It was a sign in biblical times to authenticate a messenger of God.
Historical Denomination Alignment	- Assembly of God - Full Gospel Churches - Some Vineyard	- Christian and Missionary Alliance - Some Baptist - Many Vineyard	- Many Baptist - Presbyterians - Episcopalians
Prominent Adherents Today	- Benny Hinn - Oral and Richard Roberts - Jimmy Swaggart - Kenneth Hagan	- John Stott - Tony Campollo - Billy Graham - Matt Chandler	- John MacArthur - Charles Stanley - David Jeremiah - Chuck Swindoll
Tongues is explained by	- The Holy Spirit - At times explained by other phenomenon	- At times the Holy Spirit - At times social and psychological phenomenon - At times Satanic influences	Either psychological or social phenomenon - or by Satanic influences
How is the experience entered into	By tarrying (Luke 24:49), praying (Acts 8) and laying on of hands (Acts 8).	Spontaneously as the Spirit directs.	Falsely
Explanation of historical gap	There is no gap or viewed through Joel 2:28-32	Thinks history is not determinative	Proof that tongues have ceased

Clarifying Questions:

1. Was tongues a known language or an ecstatic utterance or both? What does it mean for today?

The Greek for tongue = *glossa*. The Greek for speaking in tongues = *glossalalia*. There are 50 occurrences in the New Testament:

- 16 times it refers to the physical tongue or our spoken words: Mark 7:33,35; Luke 1:64; Acts 2:26; Rom 3:13; Rom 14:11; 1 Cor 14:9; Phil 2:11; James 1:26; James 3:5; 6 (2x), 8; 1 John 3:18; 1 Peter 3:10; Rev 16:10
- 1 time it is used to refer to the tongue in the intermediate state (between death and the resurrection from the dead): Luke 16:24
- 1 time it is used supernaturally: Acts 2:3
- 7 times it is used to refer to people groups: Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:5
- 25 times it is used to refer to tongues as a spoken entity: Mark 16:7; Acts 2:4-11; 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor 12:10(2x); 12:28; 12:30; 13:1; 13:8; 14:2; 14:5, 14:5(2x) 14:6; 14:13; 14:14; 14:18; 14:19; 14:22; 14:23; 14:26; 14:27; 14:29

See the footnote in the NIV or NASB noting tongues as "languages."

See Acts 2:5-13 - Principle of Interpretation

Ecstatic utterance is not unique to Christianity.

What would be a more clearly miraculous? - Known languages or ecstatic utterances?

2. Does Acts teach a pattern of how the Holy Spirit works in a believer's life that is normative for all time?

Most proponents of the "everyone should" position would also see tongues in Acts 4:31 and Acts 8:15-25. These two passages along with the Acts 2, 10 and 19 form the basis of this discussion.

If you grant that Acts is establishing a pattern for all time - then this chart compares what is being put forth as the pattern:

Experience	Acts 2	Acts 4	Acts 8	Acts 10	Acts 19
<i>Sound of Wind</i>	Yes	No	No	No	No
<i>Tongues of Fire</i>	Yes	No	No	No	No
<i>Place Shaken</i>	No	Yes	No	No	No
<i>Tongues Spoken</i>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
<i>Laying Hands</i>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Prayer</i>	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
<i>Tongues after Salv</i>	Yes	Doesn't Say	Doesn't Say	No	No
<i>Tongues at Salv</i>	No	Doesn't Say	Doesn't Say	Yes	Yes
<i>Known language</i>	Yes	Not Recorded	Not Recorded	Likely (10:47)	Likely

If you believe that Acts is establishing a pattern for all time - then what about these patterns?

- Acts 1:26 - Casting lots in decisions
- Acts 2:44-4:55 - Selling possessions and having everything in common
- Acts 2:46 - Daily religious meetings
- Acts 4:32 - Sharing all possessions
- Acts 5 - Sudden death follows false worship
- Acts 6 - Seven men should be appointed to care for widows
- Acts 9:3 - Conversion should be accompanied by a bright light
- Acts 9:36-43 - Ability to raise the dead
- Acts 16:25 - Should be freed from prison after singing and praying
- Acts 20:7-12 - Ability to raise the dead

Acts is relevant - but it is indeed descriptive not prescriptive. This doesn't mean that we don't learn from Acts.

What about Mark 16? Doesn't it teach that tongues will be a pattern for all time?

5 signs that were to accompany belief:

- Drive out demons
- Speak in new tongues (Greek = kainos not neos)
- Pick up snakes
- Drink deadly poison without harm
- Heal sick people

3. Is the Baptism of the Spirit a distinct experience from conversion?

Key verses: Matt 3:11; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; Acts 2; Acts 11:6; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; Gal 3:26-28; Eph 4:5; 1 Cor 12:13

There is often confusion between the Baptism of the Spirit and the Filling of the Spirit:

Baptism of the Holy Spirit	Filling of the Holy Spirit
Happens Once	Happens many times
Was predicted in Gospels and Acts 1 - happened in Acts 2 - is now a universal event for believers	Happens in response to a yielding to the Holy Spirit that empowers for service and life
Never commanded	Commanded (Eph 5:18)
Positional truth	Is experiential and practical
Aorist tense in 1 Cor 12:13	Present tense in Eph 5:18
Results in presence of Spirit in life	Results in power of Spirit in life

4. Is speaking in tongues the evidence of the Holy Spirit's power in person's life?

Eph 5:18-21 - the participles show what happens when filled with the Holy Spirit (NAB more obvious)

- Speaking to one another
- Singing and making music
- Giving thanks
- Submitting

1 Cor 12:30 - "Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts?"

'It is often implied by those who advocate the "everyone should" position that those who do not speak in tongues are missing out on the potential of the Spirit's power in their lives. 2 Peter 1:3-4.

Conclusion

1 Cor 12-14 is the controlling passage on this issue. Any manifestations of tongues should reflect this passage.

1 Cor 14 teaches specifically that gifts are for the edification of the whole body (1 Cor 14:4)

1 Cor 14 teaches specifically that understanding is to be valued (1 Cor 14:6-20)

1 Cor 14 teaches specifically that unbelievers' perceptions matter (1 Cor 14:22-25)

1 Cor 14 teaches specifically that any practice should be directed by order (1 Cor 14:26-40)