



Tongues in Acts and Corinthians

UNDERSTANDING TWO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Scripture presents speaking in tongues in two distinct settings with different purposes. Careful interpretation requires allowing each passage to speak within its own context.



TONGUES IN ACTS 2

PUBLIC SIGN AT PENTECOST

- ✓ **Known Human Languages** – The hearers identified that the apostles were speaking in their own languages (Acts 2:6, 8, 11).
- ✓ **Immediate Understanding** – No interpretation was needed; the message was heard and understood by the crowd.
- ✓ **Public Proclamation** – A sign to authenticate the gospel to Israel and the nations.
- ✓ **Sign Connected to Pentecost** – This outpouring fulfilled Joel’s prophecy and accompanied the inauguration of the church age.
- ✓ **Multinational Audience** – Devout Jews from many nations were present in Jerusalem.
- ✓ **Result** – The message was heard, understood, and many were added to the church.



Acts 2:5–11

They heard them speaking in their own languages the mighty works of God.



TONGUES IN 1 CORINTHIANS

EDIFICATION IN THE CHURCH

- ✓ **Not Identified as Human Languages** – Paul assumes that tongues may not be understood (1 Cor. 14:2).
- ✓ **Interpretation Required** – To be beneficial in the church, tongues must be interpreted (1 Cor. 14:13).
- ✓ **Regulated Use** – Paul gives instructions for orderly use in corporate worship (1 Cor. 14:27–28).
- ✓ **Possible Distinction in Function** – Paul treats tongues and prophecy as distinct gifts with different roles in the church.
- ✓ **Congregational Audience** – The focus is on the edification of believers in a church setting.
- ✓ **Result** – Edification, not spectacle. “Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26).



1 Corinthians 14:1–5, 13–19, 26–28

He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

FEATURE	ACTS 2	1 CORINTHIANS 14
Audience	Multinational crowd in Jerusalem	Local church in Corinth
Languages	Known human languages	May be unknown; interpretation needed
Interpretation Needed?	No	Yes, for the edification of others
Purpose	Public sign to authenticate the gospel	Edification and order in corporate worship
Setting	Pentecost (inauguration of the church age)	Church assembly (ongoing instruction)
Result	Message understood; many believed (Acts 2:41)	Edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:26)



THE BOTTOM LINE

Scripture presents tongues within different contexts and purposes. Acts emphasizes the public sign accompanying the Gospel’s expansion among the nations, while Corinthians addresses ordered congregational worship and edification. Careful interpretation requires allowing each passage to speak within its own setting.



TEACHER NOTE

Use this sheet to help learners see how context shapes meaning in Scripture. Encourage humility, love, and unity as we study passages that have been debated in the church.



KEY VERSES

Acts 2:4–11

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

Acts 10:44–46

“For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and magnifying God.”

1 Corinthians 12:10

“To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues...”

1 Corinthians 14:27–28

“If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret.”



KEY TRUTHS

- Scripture teaches the reality of tongues in both settings.
- Acts 2 highlights a public sign to authenticate the gospel.
- 1 Corinthians 14 addresses order, interpretation, and edification in the church.
- Different contexts, different emphases—both are true to Scripture.



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