



Speaking in Tongues at Church on the Living Edge

A Short Study on Pentecostal Practice and Theology

Introduction

At Church on the Living Edge, we are unashamedly Pentecostal. We believe in the ongoing, active work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church today. One of the signs of this ongoing work is the gift of speaking in tongues, which continues to be a vital expression of worship, prayer, and edification within our gatherings.

Speaking in tongues, also known as *glossolalia*, is not merely a relic of the early church. It is a present gift (*charisma*) and practice (*praxis*) rooted in the biblical witness and affirmed by the historic Pentecostal tradition. For us, it is both spiritual and scriptural, deeply personal yet ecclesiological significant.¹

What Is Speaking in Tongues?

Definition. Speaking in tongues is a Spirit-enabled act in which a believer speaks, prays, or sings in a language unknown to them. These may be human or angelic languages (1 Corinthians 13:1), but they are always inspired by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; 1 Corinthians 12:10).¹

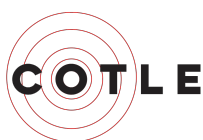
Two primary expressions in Pentecostal theology:

1. Public Use with Interpretation

- Functions analogously to prophecy and must be accompanied by interpretation when it is addressed to the gathered body (1 Corinthians 14:5, 27–28).
- The aim is the edification of the church body, so intelligibility is required.¹

2. Private Devotional Use (Prayer Language)

- A Spirit-given mode of personal prayer or praise directed to God (1 Corinthians 14:2; cf. Romans 8:26–27).
- Interpretation is not required because its immediate effect is personal edification, which in turn strengthens one's participation in the body (1 Corinthians 14:4, 14–15).¹⁻³



Why We Pray in Tongues in Corporate Worship

In many of our worship gatherings, you may hear people praying or singing in tongues. This is not meant to be disruptive, confusing, or performative. It is an overflow of the Spirit-filled life.

We affirm with Paul:

“What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” (1 Corinthians 14:15)

Key distinction of intent and direction:

- If a tongue is directed to the congregation, it must be interpreted so that all may be edified (1 Corinthians 14:5, 27–28).
- If a tongue is directed to God as an act of worship or prayer, interpretation is not required, since it is not a message to the body but a prayer of the spirit to God (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14).¹

Pentecostal scholarship underscores this Pauline balance: do not forbid tongues, but practice them in ways that ensure edification and order (1 Corinthians 14:39–40). Public address requires intelligibility; congregational prayer and praise allow for Spirit-led devotion, including tongues, directed to God.¹⁻³

Theological Foundations

1) Spirit-Initiated Worship

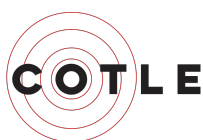
- Tongues is not self-generated speech but Spirit-enabled prayer and praise. The Day of Pentecost sets this pattern: “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The initiative belongs to God, who empowers the church to witness and worship.²⁻³

2) Personal and Communal Edification

- Paul distinguishes effects: the one who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves (1 Corinthians 14:4), while interpreted speech edifies the church. Devotional tongues properly form the heart in love, humility, and intercession, which strengthens unity in the gathered body.¹⁻³

3) Sign of the Spirit’s Fullness

- In Acts, tongues repeatedly accompany fresh outpourings of the Spirit (Acts 2:1–4; 10:44–46; 19:6). Classical Pentecostal theology has seen this recurring pattern as a sign that the Spirit is present in power for witness and holy living, while insisting that Christian maturity is measured by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).²⁻³



4) Apostolic Continuity with an Eschatological Horizon

- Tongues participates in the apostolic experience of Spirit-baptized praise, while also anticipating the future gathering of “every tribe and language” in worship (Revelation 7:9–10). It is a sign and foretaste of the Spirit’s sanctifying and uniting work as the church awaits consummation.²⁻³

What About Order in Worship?

We value both freedom and order (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). We encourage believers to pray in tongues during worship as an expression of personal surrender, spiritual sensitivity, and holy desire. We also teach spiritual maturity, the honoring of the gathered body, and the following of pastoral leadership in the service.

Practical guidance for our services:

- Corporate prayer and praise. During seasons of collective prayer or worship, believers may pray or sing in tongues to God. Because these utterances are God-directed and not congregational addresses, interpretation is not required. This practice is biblically permissible and pastorally beneficial when exercised with humility and attentiveness to those around us (1 Corinthians 14:2, 14–15, 28).¹
- Public address to the congregation. When an individual senses a Spirit-prompted message in tongues addressed to the whole church, we expect a corresponding interpretation so that all may understand and be edified (1 Corinthians 14:5, 27–28). If no interpretation is forthcoming, the speaker should refrain from further public utterance and continue in quiet prayer to God (1 Corinthians 14:28).¹
- Pastoral oversight. Leaders steward the flow of worship so that spiritual gifts are exercised “decently and in order,” integrating fervor with intelligibility. Love is the governing ethic; edification is the governing aim (1 Corinthians 13; 14:26, 40).¹

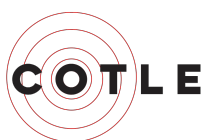
Common Questions

Do all Christians have to speak in tongues?

No. We encourage all to seek the fullness of the Spirit and to be open to all the Spirit’s gifts, including tongues, without making any single gift the measure of salvation or maturity. The Spirit distributes gifts as he wills for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7–11, 29–30).¹⁻³

Why allow tongues in the room if visitors might be present?

Paul’s concern is confusion, not suppression. When tongues are used as prayer to God amid corporate worship, they need not be interpreted. When a tongue is addressed to the congregation,



it must be interpreted. Clear teaching and pastoral guidance help visitors understand what is occurring and why, so that “God is really among you” becomes the testimony (1 Corinthians 14:25, 39–40).¹

How does this practice form disciples?

Devotional tongues deepen dependence on the Spirit, widen the church’s intercessory life, and cultivate humility and praise. Interpreted tongues, like prophecy, strengthen, encourage, and console the body, prompting obedience and mission.^{2, 3}

In Summary

We believe that speaking in tongues is both a gift and a discipline—a means of prayer, worship, and alignment with God’s Spirit. When exercised in love, guided by Scripture, and expressed in the Spirit of unity, it brings life to the church.

We welcome all to explore this gift with humility, reverence, and openness to the Spirit’s work.

Sources

1. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); and *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).
2. Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).
3. Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Oppressed* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).



theological and practical content for personal and spiritual development.

