
Chapter 12.11

**Did the Apostles & Christ Teach
Mindless Prayer?**

Understanding 1 Corinthians 14:14-15

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Primary Points

- All will not, and *should* not, possess the gift of tongues.
- There are several insurmountable problems with the idea that the Apostle is advocating a habit of mindless prayer. First, it violates the clear commands and instructions in Scripture, even from Jesus, of the need to have our mind engaged in any prayer that would be pleasing to God.
- *Glossaist* do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who “**pray in a tongue**” when he says their “**mind is unfruitful** [*akarpos*: “unproductive, barren”].
- Calvin: “Let us take notice, that Paul reckons it a great fault if the mind is not occupied in prayer. And these things [should] have been perfectly familiar to every mind, had not the devil besotted the world to such a degree, as to make men believe that they pray aright, when they merely make their lips move.”
- The Apostle said he would do something better than “**pray in a tongue**,” which leaves the “**mind . . . unfruitful**.” That was to “**pray with my** [human] **spirit** [emotions], **but also** [at the same time] **pray with my mind** [understanding]” which excludes the habit of praying in a tongue.
- The Apostle Peter agrees with the Apostle Paul and speaks of the vital place of the mind in any Christian prayer saying, “**be clear-minded so that you can pray**,” and he certainly didn’t mean “empty-minded”
- God the Son spoke naturally to God the Father and instructed us to do the same, not in the obscure utterances that are being exalted today.
- When Jesus condemned “**babbling like the pagans**” as a form of prayer He was specifically referring to praying in an unintelligible tongue just like the modern “tongues” movement promotes and practices today as an extra-spiritual form of prayer.
- It is admitted that what is being suggested here is quite serious: praying in obscure gibberish is not just meaningless but sinful.

A) The Apostle Paul's Instruction to Pray With our Spirit *and* Mind: 1 Cor 14:15

In verses 14-15 the Apostle tells the Corinthians:

[A]nyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. If I pray in a tongue [glosse, "unknown utterance"], my spirit [not Holy Spirit!] prays, but my mind is unfruitful [akarpos: "unproductive, barren"]. So what shall I do? [And what should Christians do?] I will pray with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] sing with my mind. (14-15)

Glossaists interpret the Apostle here as saying that there are two kinds of praying and singing, one with the mind and the other without. More specifically, they claim that to "**pray with my spirit**" apart from the mind is legitimate and the biblical gift of tongues. Accordingly, Dr. Fee writes:

[The Corinthians'] error in understanding permit us to catch a glimpse of what otherwise would be unknown, namely, the Apostle's own interior life in the Spirit. . . . [W]hat we learn here is that his "spirituality" included a continual life of praying and singing in the Spirit-in this case, with glossolalia. . . . [Here] we have especially the description of his own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit. ¹

Likewise, *glossaist* NT scholar Michael Green writes:

Perhaps one of the areas of profit that we may need to be reminded of in an over-cerebral age is this: [praying in an incoherent tongue] allows the human spirit to pray, even when the mind is unfruitful because it cannot understand (I Cor. 14:14). Many people pray in tongues while driving a car or washing up - their mind can be employed elsewhere. Clearly, therefore, tongues is a valuable gift for private edification. It can bring a profound sense of the presence of God, and lead, as a result, to a release from tension and worry, and a deepening of love and trust. As the Holy Spirit leads the believer in such prayer, there is often a deep sense of being in harmony with God. ²

There are several insurmountable problems with the idea that the Apostle is advocating a habit of mindless prayer. First, it violates the clear commands and instructions in Scripture, even from Jesus, of the need to have our mind engaged in any prayer

that would be pleasing to God. The biblical commands regarding prayer will be discussed further below.

Secondly, the Apostle prefaces the passage by saying, "**Anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says**" (v. 13). We would ask again, if praying in a mindless, meaningless way is so valuable, why would the Apostle say this? It is because he knew that it would be better even for the tongue speaker to know the meaning of what they were praying, because as we argued in the previous chapter, there is no value in utterances that are not understood, not to the individual or others.³

Thirdly, *glossaist* too easily dismiss or intentionally ignore the significance of the Apostle's statement that the person who prays "**in a tongue**" does it with "**my spirit**" (i.e. seat of human emotions), not the *Holy Spirit*. As mentioned previously, the Apostle does not mention the Holy Spirit in all of 1 Corinthians 14, but rather the human spirit. It would have been very easy for the Apostle to specify the involvement of the Holy Spirit here, but he intentionally does not. Accordingly, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton writes:

A disastrous move [in 1 Cor 14:14-15], however, is to confuse [*pneuma*] as a noncognitive or "spiritual" human capacity, with Spirit as the Holy Spirit of God. There are at least two different reasons. First, Pauline specialists generally agree that Platonic or Idealist notions of the human spirit as a point of "divine contact" are alien to Paul and plainly alien to the explicit thrust of I Cor 2:10-12.

Second, to read this into 14:15 is to fall into the very trap to which the Corinthians and many today fall prey, namely, of associating the operation of the Holy Spirit more closely with noncognitive "spontaneous" phenomena than with a self-critical reflection upon the word of God as that which addresses the understanding and thereby transforms the heart (cf. 14:23-25). Contrary to his usually more judicious assessments Fee repeats this disastrous confusion explicitly in his commentary and in his two more recent volumes: "my S/spirit prays."⁴

Fourth, *glossaist* do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who "**pray in a tongue**" when he says their "**mind is unfruitful**" [*akarpos*: "unproductive, barren"]. When would being "**unfruitful**" in prayer or singing or anything else be a good, Christian thing? On the contrary, it is a bad pagan thing.

Along these lines, Dr. Edgar remarks:

The tongues movement presupposes that communication with the spiritual realm is more direct when it is apart from the mind. Such a concept, though found in various religions, is contrary to biblical Christianity.⁵

As is often the case, nobody says it better (or harsher sometimes) than John Calvin (1509-1564), even if it was more than 400 years ago. Commenting on this very passage (1 Cor 14:14-15), Calvin expressed the universal conviction of the Christian Church for at least 1900 years when he wrote:

Let us take notice, that Paul reckons it a great fault if the mind is not occupied in prayer. And no wonder; for what else do we in prayer, but pour out our thoughts and desires before God? Farther, as prayer is the spiritual worship of God, what is more at variance with the nature of it, than that it should proceed merely from the lips, and not from the inmost soul? And these things [should] have been perfectly familiar to every mind, had not the devil besotted the world to such a degree, as to make men believe that they pray aright, when they merely make their lips move.⁶

Likewise, in a treatise on how to pray, Martin Luther (1483-1546) reflected the historical view of prayer when he wrote regarding those who do not think about what they are praying: "When it is all over they do not know what they have done or what they talked about,"⁷ which describes "praying in a tongue" very well. Luther went on to write:

But, praise God, it is now clear to me [although apparently not to many today] that a person who forgets [or doesn't even know] what he has said has not prayed well. In a good prayer one fully remembers [and understands] every word and thought from the beginning to the end of the prayer.⁸

More recently, other commentators on this passage have agreed with our concerns. The highly respected British NT scholar C. K. Barrett writes concerning the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:15:

The upshot of the matter is that if I pray in a tongue, part, and that a most significant part, of my nature remains out of action. This is not good for me, and it is not good for the community I ought to serve.⁹

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur writes that the answer to the Apostle's question, "What should I do?" in 14:15 is that:

there is no place for mindless ecstatic prayer. Praying and singing with the spirit must be accompanied by praying and

singing with the mind also. It is obvious that edification cannot exist apart from the mind. Spirituality involves more than the mind, but it never excludes the mind (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10).¹⁰

Along the same lines, NT scholar Leon Morris interprets this passage as follows:

Anyone who prays in a tongue is not using his mind (*nous*). The Christian life is considerably more than a mental exercise, but anyone whose mind is unfruitful is not being true to his Christian calling. This passage is very important for its insistence on the rightful place of the intellect. Notice that this is secured without any diminution of spiritual fervour. Paul is not arguing for a barren intellectualism.

There is a place for the enthusiasm so strikingly exemplified in the use of 'tongues'. But it must be allied to the use of the mind, and this 'tongues' by itself does not provide. Paul singles out two activities specially appropriate in public worship: prayer and singing. Both must be done intelligently, with the mind. . . . Clearly Paul is not looking for unintelligible [mindless] prayers. . .¹¹

Also, D. A. Carson has written:

What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising, because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what Christian living should be; it is depressing, because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.

Scarcely less disturbing is the enthusiastic praying in some circles that overflows with emotional release but is utterly uncontrolled by any thoughtful reflection on the prayers of Scripture.¹²

Unfortunately, if Dr. Carson is speaking of praying in tongues, then we suggest he has little to complain about because in our opinion he is partially responsible for giving the practice "biblical" support in his mistaken interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 in his 1987 book, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14*.

Perhaps the best synopsis of what the Apostle is teaching here is found in Richard Oster's commentary:

In 14:14-15 Paul enters into specific instruction which, in my judgment, makes the most sense when viewed against the backdrop of residual pagan thinking among certain converts.

Specifically, Paul's corrective use of the mind/spirit dichotomy seemingly assumes a situation where the tongue speakers are relying only on their "spiritual" component to the neglect of their rational self. Even though there is no such radical antithesis between mind and spirit in Pauline anthropology, there is apparently such in the thinking and practice of these Corinthian saints. Accordingly, Paul's observation about the unfruitfulness of the mind of the Corinthian tongue speakers during their prayers-in-tongues implies an "irrational" dimension to their spirituality and piety that Paul finds unacceptable. . . .

This type of "irrational" focus in communion with the divine was well known in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish materials of antiquity. E. R. Dodd's classic work entitled *The Greeks and the Irrational*, unfortunately neglected by most interpreters of 1 Cor 14, shows how widespread and deeply rooted the notion of the "irrational" was in the pagan concepts of prophecy, enthusiasm, and oracular possession. This is the very reason why pagan visitors to the [Corinthian] worship service can so readily interpret this aberrant tongue speaking in light of the pagan oracular experiences and presume a deity is also in the midst of these tongue speakers in the church of God.¹³

Finally, a major mistake *glossaist* make here is to assume that the Apostle is advocating two kinds of prayer and singing, one which only engages the human "spirit" and consequently also, a type of praying and singing that only engages the mind. There are obviously several problems with this. First, *glossaist* must be consistent, and if they are going to claim the Apostle is advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the "spirit" and not the mind, then they must also admit that he is equally advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the intellect, and not the affections. Not surprisingly, *glossaists* never suggest an example of only praying or singing with the understanding and not our emotions and desires that is equally legitimate.

What kind of worship would that be, and would the Apostle encourage it? Obviously, it is hard to even conceive of authentic Christian worship that excludes the spirit of a person, and even if we could conceive of it, we certainly wouldn't advocate it. The same is true of the idea that authentic Christian praying or singing could exclude the mind. As usual, *Charismaticism*¹⁴ is separating what God has joined together.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the Apostle recognizes that one could pray and sing with only the "spirit" which would seem to be doing so with

merely a great deal of subconscious emotion and very little conscious understanding. Which, of course, describes both what was occurring in the pagan mystery religion temples of the time and in the modern and unbiblical version of the gift of tongues. However, and contrary to the claims of *Glossaists*, the Apostle says that praying or singing with only the human spirit is “**unfruitful**” (14:14).

If this is the case, then what kind of prayer and singing is the Apostle advocating in 1 Corinthians 14:15? It is obvious to anyone except those needing to find biblical support for their pagan prayer and worship practices. The Apostle writes:

So what shall I do [because praying and singing with only with my spirit is unfruitful]? **I will pray with my spirit, but I will also** [*at the same time*] **pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also** [*at the same time*] **sing with my mind.** (14-15)

We are rather perplexed again as we are reminded of Dr. Fee’s interpretation that:

[Here] we have especially the description of his [the Apostle’s] own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit.¹⁶

Again, Dr. Fee offers no support or examples of why the Apostle would ever only pray with his mind and not his spirit.

Contrary to *glossaism*, the Apostle is describing the only legitimate way for a Christian to pray, which is with *both* the spirit (affections, emotions, and desires) *and* the mind (reason, thinking, understanding) *simultaneously*, just as is described throughout the rest of the Bible. He is describing what we have described elsewhere as *whole-hearted* worship, and singing or praying with only the spirit is surely a violation of the King’s encouragement to worship “**in spirit and in truth**” (cf. John 4:21-24).¹⁷

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton writes in his detailed commentary of the Greek text:

Paul argues equally against uncritical "enthusiasm," uncritical "renewal" traditions, or uncritical mysticism on one side and against gnostics, theological theorists, or any who seek to intellectualize Christian faith into a mere belief system on the other. Christians are confronted not by an either . . . or . . . but by a both . . . and. . . .

Paul declares that being "spiritual," i.e., of the Holy Spirit, occurs "when the Holy Spirit [simultaneously] controls both the spirit and the mind."¹⁸

Additional scholarly support for the fact that the Apostle is advocating prayer and singing that simultaneously engages the human spirit and the mind is found in the authoritative Greek lexicon *BAGD* which interprets the Greek of the latter half of v. 15 as: "sing praise . . . in full possession of one's mental faculties."¹⁹

How then can any Christian find any encouragement here to pray or sing in an empty state of mind that the Apostle says is *akarpos*, useless and barren (1 Cor 14:14)? On the contrary, he essentially says, "I would do something better than mindlessly, emotionally, uselessly, and selfishly just pray or sing with my spirit like the pagans do, I will also pray and sing with my mind so I and others know what I'm praying and singing!"

B) The Apostle Peter's Instruction to Pray With Our Minds: 1 Pet 4:7

The Apostle Peter agrees with the Apostle Paul on this point and speaks of the vital place of the mind in any Christian prayer when he writes, "**be of sound judgment** [*sōphronēsate*] **and sober** [*nēpsate*] **spirit for the purpose of prayer**" (1 Pet 4:7 NASB). The NCV renders it, "**think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray.**" The NIV translates the Apostle as saying, "**be clear-minded so that you can pray,**" and he certainly didn't mean "empty-minded" which describes a great deal of the *half-hearted* kind of prayer many are advocating today when they promote "praying in a tongue."

Again, when we understand that the human "heart" contains our reason, desires, and emotions, we understand that it is not just a lack of emotional fervor that results in *half-hearted prayer*, but a neglect of our intellect as well. When we think particularly of the popular practice of "praying in a tongue," it would seem to be an example of *half-hearted prayer*, and the Apostle Peter's command would therefore clearly condemn it.

Those who claim the Apostle Paul is encouraging "praying in a tongue" in 1 Corinthians 14 must at least admit that its mindless nature violates the Apostle Peter's command to "**be of sound judgment** [*sōphronēsate*] **and sober spirit** [*nēphate*] **for the purpose of prayer**" (1 Pet 4:7 NASB), and contradicts everything else the Bible says about prayer, as the conscious engagement of the Christian's mind is always either clearly commanded or presupposed. Accordingly, NT scholar Paul Achtemeier writes of the Greek used in Peter's statement:

The verb from which the second imperative is formed [*nēphō*] means literally the opposite of drunkenness, but is probably

used here, as elsewhere in the NT, in the metaphorical sense of remaining alert and in full possession of one's "sound mind." ²⁰

Curiously, Wayne Grudem in his own commentary on 1 Peter, writes:

Peter's words also imply that prayer based on knowledge and mature evaluation of a situation is more effective prayer [even than the tongues he advocates?]. Otherwise there would be no relationship between being 'sane and sober' and one's prayers [You mean like when people pray in tongues?]. ²¹

C) The King's Instruction Not to "Babble Like Pagans" When We Pray: *Matt 6:5-9*

While the Apostle Peter's instruction above is explicit, we would suggest that the King's own instruction on prayer is implicit in advocating the place of the mind in prayer. For example, we read in Luke:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say [using your mind, of course]: "Father, hallowed be Your Name, Your Kingdom come. . ." (Luke 11:1-2).

It should be noticed that when Jesus taught the disciples how to communicate with God, He told them to use logically based propositional statements like, "**Our Father Who is in Heaven**" (Matt 6:9) which require logical and reasonable thought to formulate, understand, and express.

It is obvious that when the King was praying here, it was not in a "tongue" and when His disciples specifically asked Him to teach them how to pray He did not advocate such a practice. Accordingly, there is no mention of the King ever praying in an obscure tongue, including the very intimate and emotional prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His "high priestly prayer" recorded in John 17. His prayers in both these cases were *from God to God*. It would seem if there was ever a time for the "super prayer language" that is claimed in *glossaism* to be demonstrated, these events would have provided the opportunity to validate such a thing. God the Son spoke naturally to God the Father and instructed us to do the same, not in the obscure utterances that are being exalted today.

In fact, the King would seem to have condemned several practices particularly in *glossaism* regarding prayer when He taught:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling [*battalogēsēte*] like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many [*polulogia*: "utterances"]. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your name . . ." (Matt 6:5-9)

When the King speaks of "**secret**" prayer He obviously is not advocating a "private prayer language." However, it would seem possible to apply His rebuke to someone standing in a public assembly praying audibly in obscure gibberish just "**to be seen by men**" to a great many prayer meetings in *glossaism*.

The King's command that "**when you pray, do not keep on babbling** (*battalogēsēte*) **like pagans**" would also seem to have some relevance to our discussion of modern *glossaism*. Obviously the King is not condemning *meaningful* repetition in prayer as is exemplified by His own prayers in the Garden of Gethsemene and encouraged in His parable of the unjust judge and the widow (cf. Luke 18:1-8).²² In addition, Christ's mention of the pagans praying with "**many words**" (*polulogia*) can just as well be translated "much utterance," without the implication that the utterances have meaning as real words.²³

Accordingly, the more important word to understand is "**babbling**" (*battalogēsēte*). The Apostle Matthew's use of such a rare word to reflect Christ's meaning is very significant. Many assume that the King was merely referring to repetitive prayer such as practiced in Roman Catholicism by praying through the rosary. If this was so, other common Greek words could have been used by the Apostle to translate what Christ meant (e.g. *palin*: "again"; cf. 2 Cor 11:16; 13:2; "repeat" in NIV). However, Christ obviously meant to describe a kind of prayer that was much more than mere repetition, but an incoherent "**babbling**."

The Greek *battalogēsēte* is a unique word and only used here in the NT. The well-respected *Greek-English Lexicon of the New*

Testament and Early Christian Literature (BAGD) defines *battalogēsēte* as “to speak in a way that images the kind of speech pattern of one who stammers, use the same utterances again and again, speak without thinking.”²⁴ Accordingly, the NIV “**babbling**,” which *Webster’s* defines as: “to utter meaningless or unintelligible sounds” is a very good translation, and a very good description of modern *glossaism*.²⁵

It is agreed by most that “praying in a tongue” is indeed mindless as *battalogēsēte* suggests. In addition, it is admitted that tongue utterances are meaningless to the speaker, an aspect that is captured in the NCV translation of *battalogēsēte* as “**saying things that mean nothing**,” and the ESV and RSV which reads, “**heap up empty phrases**.” The NASB translates *battalogēsēte* as “**meaningless repetition**” which linguists around the world would confirm perfectly reflects the practice of “praying in a tongue.”²⁶

Also, as demonstrated in a previous chapter, praying in an incoherent “tongue” was commonly known to be a frequent practice in the Greek mystery religions right at the time when the King lived on the Earth.²⁷ We noted there that we have considerable evidence that praying publicly in meaningless, “**babbling**,” gibberish was thought to be a more spiritual kind of prayer practiced in the pagan mystery religion temples.

It seems quite reasonable then to interpret the King’s condemnation of “**babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans**” to refer to this very thing. Accordingly, the NLT reads, “**don’t babble . . . as people of other religions do.**” It is suggested here then that a legitimate translation of the King’s words would simply be, “When you pray, do not make meaningless and incoherent “babble” like the pagans do in their temples, for they think they will be heard because they do this a lot. But when you pray, do it in a meaningful, coherent way like ‘Our Father . . .’”²⁸

Accordingly, NT scholar John Stott remarks regarding the King’s instruction, “**when you pray, do not keep on babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans**”:

To sum up, what Jesus forbids his people is any kind of prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged. . . . Jesus intends our minds and hearts to be involved in what we are saying. Then prayer is seen in its true light—not as a meaningless repetition of words, nor as a means to our own glorification, but as a true communion with our heavenly Father. . . .

Thus Christian prayer is seen in contrast to its non-Christian alternatives. It is God-centered (concerned for God’s glory) in contrast to the self-centeredness of the Pharisees (preoccupied with their own glory). And it is intelligent

(expressive of thoughtful dependence) in contrast to the mechanical incantations of the heathen.

Therefore when we come to God in prayer, we do not come hypocritically like play actors seeking the applause of men, nor mechanically like pagan babblers, whose mind is not in their mutterings, but thoughtfully, humbly and trustfully like little children to their father.²⁹

While Dr. Stott does not specifically condemn “praying in a tongue,” one could hardly describe those who do, any better than those, “whose mind is not in their mutterings.”

Along the same lines, theology Professors Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis write:

Many approaches to meditation today under the influence of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism ask that a person's mind be rid of all conceptual thought from any source whatever, including propositional revelation. That may be an appropriate way to identify with the impersonal, nonintelligent energy of the cosmos, but it is not an acceptable way to commune with the heavenly Father to whom Jesus asked us to pray without vain [empty] repetition.³⁰

It is clear that the King's command to pray coherently with understandable content is clearly violated by “praying in a tongue” that is admittedly incoherent. It is not the *content* of the Lord's Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan's prayer, for surely the pagans desired many of the same things listed (e.g. daily bread, protection from evil, etc.) No, it was the *method* of the Lord's Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan practice. Pagans prayed *half-heartedly* in mindless merely emotional gibberish (*battalogēsēte*). The King told us to pray *whole-heartedly* in coherent, meaningful, natural speech which requires our mind.

One could hardly suggest a better description of the pagan “tongue” prayer than that of Gerd Theissen, Professor of New Testament Theology at the University of Heidelberg, who refers to it as “the language of the unconscious.”³¹ It would seem then that the practice of “praying in a tongue” resembles the ancient pagan practice and violates the King's command because its practitioners: 1) admit that they do not understand what they are praying in a tongue, and 2) according to linguists, the prayer language consists of repeating cycles of the same meaningless syllables, and 3) It violates the King's clear command to pray coherently and meaningfully in natural human language.

If some still doubt that the King's words apply to praying in incoherent utterances, then it is suggested that they imagine

themselves on “the Mount” that day, sitting in front of Him, when He spoke these words:

When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans . . . Do not be like them [pagans] . . . This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father Who is in Heaven . . . (Matt 6:7-9)

Now, imagine that immediately after personally hearing these words of the King, someone stood up in the crowd and audibly uttered a “prayer” in an incoherent “tongue.” Imagine further that afterwards the person explains to the crowd: “What He just said about not “**babbling like pagans**” really doesn’t include ‘praying in a tongue.’ Sure, it obviously resembles what the pagans do in their temples, but it can also be a spiritual gift from God, and in fact a special and even more spiritual way of communing with God that should be sought by all of God’s children.” Do you think the King would be nodding with approval? Neither do we think He approves of it today.

It is admitted that what is being suggested here is quite serious: praying in obscure gibberish is not just meaningless but sinful. It is also admitted that the King did not explicitly use the words “praying in a tongue” when he condemned “**babbling like the pagans**” and some may understandably object to the above interpretation. However, understanding the religious context of His statement, and the popularity of “**babbling**” in a tongue in the Greek mystery religions at the very time He said this, provides considerable support for our view.³² Nonetheless, the concepts are clearly related enough that one could ask why someone would even want to come close to something our Lord seemed so passionately against?

Extras & Endnotes

Devotion to Dad

Our Father Who is in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What are several problems with the idea that the Apostle is advocating a habit of mindless prayer in 1 Corinthians 14:14-15?
- 2) We claim *glossaists* do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who “**pray in a tongue**” when he says their “**mind is unfruitful** [*akarpos*: “unproductive, barren”]. Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 3) How do *glossaists* interpret 1 Corinthians 14:14-15? How do we interpret it? Which one do you agree with and why?
- 4) What does the Apostle Peter say about prayer that would seem to condemn mindless prayer?
- 5) In what ways do we claim that Christ Himself condemned mindless prayer? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) We claim that modern “tongues prayer” is not only meaningless but sinful. Do you agree or disagree and why?

Publications & Particulars

¹ Gordon Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994), 270, 581.

² Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2004).

³ Dr. Fee recognizes that the critical need for mental understanding is the face-value meaning of 14:13 and comments:

[T]he contextual difficulties are considerable if the [text] is original and the intent is that the tongues-speaker should pray for the gift of interpretation for the benefit of his or her own understanding, a view espoused by Calvin 292, Grosheide 325-26, Morris 194, Ruef 150, Mare 273. Not only does this contradict vv. 2, 4, and 15, but it places a premium on the mind as the only means whereby one may be edified personally, which also contradicts the intent of vv. 2 and 4. (*Presence*, 228-29)

The fact that Dr. Fee’s strongest argument against the face value meaning is that the text of v. 13 is not original, again, exposes the weakness of his view.

⁴ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 2000), 1112-1113.

⁵ Thomas Edgar, “The Cessation of the Sign Gifts,” *Bsac* 145 (1988), 384.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries, in loc.*; online at www.ccel.org.

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- ⁷ Martin Luther, "A Practical Way to Pray," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull, (Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 15.
- ⁸ *Ibid*
- ⁹ C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC) (Hendrickson, 2000), 320.
- ¹⁰ MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, *loc. cit.*
- ¹¹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1985), 190.
- ¹² D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Baker, 1992), 9.
- ¹³ Richard E. Oster, *The College Press NIV Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, Electronic Edition STEP Files (Parsons, 1997)
- ¹⁴ For a definition of *charismaticism* see endnote in chapter 12.1.
- ¹⁵ In addition to separating human understanding from human affections, *charismaticism* separates the Holy Spirit from Scripture, as if He speaks apart from it, and they separate divine revelation from divine authentication, accepting claims to revelatory gifts without demanding miraculous authentication of those gifts.
- ¹⁶ Fee, *Presence*, 270, 581.
- ¹⁷ For further discussion regarding what is necessary for God-pleasing worship and interaction with Him see chapter 4.8.
- ¹⁸ Thiselton, 1111, 1113.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1111
- ²⁰ Paul Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Fortress, 1996), 294.
- ²¹ Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (TNTC) (Eerdmans, 1988, rep. 1999), 179.
- ²² Accordingly, Dr. Stott writes:
 The familiar KJV rendering, 'Use not vain repetitions,' is therefore misleading, unless it is clear that the emphasis is on 'vain' rather than on 'repetitions.' Jesus cannot be prohibiting all repetition, for he repeated himself in prayer, notably in Gethsemane when 'he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words'. Perseverance and even importunity in prayer are commended by him also; rather is he condemning verbosity, especially in those who 'speak without thinking'. So RSV 'heap up empty phrases' is helpful. (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount Sermon* [Intervarsity, 1978], 143)
- ²³ "Much speaking" is the literal translation of *polulogia* (used only here in the NT) given by Vine (591) and the *Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance* (Robert L. Thomas, ed. [Foundation, 1998, 1559].
 Although cognates of *logos* such as *polulogia* normally imply words with meaning, *BAGD* gives a literal meaning of "utterance," apparently not

necessarily an intelligible one. Accordingly, the Apostle implies in 1 Corinthians 14 that *logon* may not contain cognitive meaning when he writes:

Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible [*eusēmon*: clear] **words** [*logon*: utterance- seeming to imply that one can speak *logon* that is not intelligible] **with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.** (1 Cor 14:7-9).

The Apostle recognizes that "utterances" (*logon*) may be spoken that are not intelligible or meaningful and his statement here regarding the incoherent tongue that the Corinthians are using has a striking resemblance to Christ's words regarding pagan characteristics of prayer.

²⁴ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), F. W. Danker ed., 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

²⁵ John Nolland in his entry to the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* notes:

[*Battalogēsēte*] may be related to a Greek root used for stuttering. If so, it is likely to be a deprecatory way of speaking about the formulaic repetition of either intelligible (names of gods, petitionary formulas, etc.) or unintelligible ('words' of magical power or the language of the gods) elements in order to multiply effectiveness with the gods.

Schlatter has noted that in compound verbs *-logein* means 'to gather'; so the intended sense could well be something like 'to string together [i.e., gather] stuttered elements of speech.' The translation 'babble on' above is not quite precise, but catches something of this.

Others look for a Semitic derivation of the *batt* element and point to the Aramaic *btl*, meaning 'empty, ineffectual', and the Hebrew *bt'*, meaning 'speak rashly, thoughtlessly'. (*The Gospel of Matthew* [Eerdmans, 2005], 284)

W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison generally agree, noting: "In the opinion of G. Dellling (*TWOT* 1.598) [*battalogēsēte*] was simply formulated on the analogy of the better known *battrizō* (= 'stammer, stutter') in connection with *-logein*" (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC) [T & T Clark, 1988], 588).

Thomas Edgar relates the consensus of the Greek lexicons on the meaning of *battalogo*:

The word *battalogo* does not occur in the Septuagint [Greek translation of OT] and occurs only in this passage in the New Testament. Arndt and Gingrich define it as "babble, to speak without thinking" (Lexicon, 137).

Moulton and Milligan see a connection between *battalogo*, *battolgeo*, and *battalos*, the nickname of Demosthenes who was so called "because of the torrent of words at his command, which made envious rivals call him "the gabbler" (Vocabulary, 107). Liddell and Scott refer to similar words, all meaning to stammer, and define

battologeō as "speak stammeringly, say the same thing over and over" (Lexicon, 311).

Beare feels that Jesus' meaning in this passage is that the disciples are not to "babble meaningless sounds" ("Speaking with Tongues," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 [September 1974] : 229). Delling agrees that it means "babble" in this verse ("Battalogoē," TDNT, 1:597).

Lampe defines the term as it was used shortly after New Testament times (Patristic Greek Lexicon, 294). One example is clearly speech apart from understanding (Damasus Tropbaea 2.4.4., which states, "*me epistamenos alla battologeōn*, not understanding, but babbling"). Another example from an early church father refers to unintelligible utterance (Gregory Nyssa). (*Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* [Kregel, 1996], 198-9)

While John Stott includes the idea of real words in the meaning of *battalogēsēte*, he writes:

The word describes any and every prayer which is all words and no meaning, all lips and no mind or heart. *Battalogia* is explained in the same verse (7) as *polulogia*, 'much speaking', that is, a torrent of mechanical and mindless words. (143-4)

Likewise, John MacArthur sees a reference to real words in the "babbling" but then describes it in a way that could certainly apply to *glossaism*:

Use meaningless repetition is one word (from *battologeō*) in the Greek and refers to idle, thoughtless chatter. It was probably onomatopoeic, mimicking the sounds of meaningless jabber. . . .

Prayer that is thoughtless and indifferent is offensive to God, and should also be offensive to us. . . . It is not honest, properly motivated repetition of needs or praise before God that is wrong, but the mindless, indifferent recital of spiritual-sounding incantations or magical formulas over and over. Not only must our hearts be right before God will hear our prayer, but also our minds. Thoughtless prayer is almost as offensive to God as heartless prayer. In most instances they go together. (*MacArthur's New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Parsons Technology, 1997], Matt 6:7)

Unfortunately, in our opinion, D. A. Carson (*The Sermon on the Mount* [Baker, 1978]) and *glossaist* Michael Green (*The Message of Matthew* [Intervarsity, 2000]), both confine the meaning of *battalogēsēte* to speaking many words. While Christ was probably including this concept as well, it is a mistake to think this was His exclusive intention.

²⁶ Many linguists who have studied the modern phenomenon of "speaking in a tongue" have commented on the fact that its contents are made up of repeating cycles of identical syllables. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* concludes the following after describing extensive, world-wide research on the tongues phenomenon:

Whatever takes place in the nervous system during [a tongue utterance] causes the utterance to break down into phrases of equal length, provided we also include the pauses. That is, using a concept

taken from music rather than linguistics, it causes the phrases to be divided into bars, each of which is accented on the first syllable, and it causes the bars to pulsate, to throb rhythmically in a [repeating] sequence of consonant-vowel, consonant-vowel. The trance state is responsible for the haunting intonation of glossolalia; never varying, it rises to a peak at the end of the first and third of the unit of utterance and drops to a level much lower than that at the onset as it comes to a close. (Mircea Eliade ed., 16 vols., [Macmillan, 1987], V:564).

- ²⁷ For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see section 12.7.A.
- ²⁸ Carl F. H. Henry adds regarding Christ's instruction on prayer: "Whether addressing God or man, Jesus placed a premium on intelligibility. (*God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 Vols. [Word, 1979], 4:489).
- ²⁹ Stott, *Sermon*, 143-45; 151-2
- ³⁰ Bruce Demarest & Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, 3 Vols. (Zondervan, 1987, 1990, 1994) I:124.
- ³¹ Gerd Theissen, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology* (T&T Clark, 1999), 79.
- ³² For a great deal more discussion on the practice of praying in an obscure tongue in the Greek mystery religions of the 1st and 2nd centuries see section 12.7.A.