
Chapter 12.1

The Serious Topic of Tongues

Understanding the Modern Tongues Debate

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Primary Points

- *Glossaism* (cf. Gk. *glossais* "languages") refers to the modern "tongues" movement which promotes and practices either a public or private variety of obscure speech or prayer thought to be a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit.
- *Hundreds of millions* of Christians claim that this gift of tongues is a special, more intimate way to pray, a source of the most intense spiritual edification, and therefore every Christian can and should possess it.
- *Glossaism* has rejected the beliefs that the Christian Church had universally held for over 1600 years on this issue.
- The issues are rather complex and not only include the need to accurately interpret the modern "tongues" experience, but also to accurately interpret some of the most obscure passages of Scripture.
- *Glossaism* is claiming that the spirituality of *hundreds of millions* of Christians now and throughout over 1600 years of Church history is rather pathetic and deficient.
- The debate regarding *glossaism* is worth careful study because either *hundreds of millions* of Christians holding to historic Christianity need to be passionately pursuing, seeking, and learning this gift with all their heart in order to communicate with and experience God in a greater way, or *hundreds of millions* of Christians in *glossaism* need to humbly and courageously repent in order to avoid continuing to sin against God. Those are precisely the options if an honest assessment is given to what both sides of the debate are claiming.
- MacArthur: "It seems that the Charismatic movement has separated the Christian community into the spiritual "haves" and "have-nots."
- Christ Himself condemned the mindless practice of modern "tongues praying" when He commanded us not to "**keep on babbling like pagans**" "**when you pray**" (Matt 6:7).
- The modern version of "tongues speaking" as an obscure "prayer language" is practiced in many non-Christian environments including by contemporary cults, witch doctors, fortune tellers, Buddhists, and New Agers.

A) Defining the Tongues Debate

“Speaking in tongues” simply means speaking in languages. But it has come to refer to a phenomenon that is a well-established practice in thousands of Christian fellowships all over the world. Congregations in *charismaticism*¹ are best known for it, with one of its foremost theologians, Max Turner, Director of Research at London Bible College, referring to the gift of tongues as “a distinctive mark of their spirituality.”² However, there are also other groups of Christians within the Lutheran, Methodist, Evangelical Free,³ and especially Roman Catholic churches who promote “speaking in tongues” as well.

There is some difficulty in succinctly defining the practice of “speaking in tongues” as it is observed today. As Thomas Edgar, Professor of New Testament at Capital Bible Seminary puts it: “Charismatics hold a veritable tangle of different opinions on the nature and practice of tongues speaking. They agree only that the gift is available today.”⁴

The phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” (languages) is often referred to as *glossolalia*.⁵ This term is based on the Greek *glossa* (“tongue”) and *glossais* (“languages”). Accordingly, we refer to the phenomenon throughout KOG as *glossaism* and its practitioners as *glossaists*.

Glossaism is understood today as two distinct types. The “public” variety is usually manifested in a church service in which one or several people utter obscure speech that is thought to contain direct, divine revelation from God. At times an “interpretation” may be given, but often it is not. While this was the original practice of tongues speaking practiced by the founders of *glossaism* throughout most of the twentieth century, a “private” variety has become more popular in recent decades. This type is understood to be more of a “private prayer language,” and manifests itself in the same type of incoherent “speech.”

Dr. Edgar explains:

Although the Pentecostal movement originally stressed the use of tongues in the public assembly, many [*glossaists*] today stress the private or devotional use of the gift of tongues. . . . This makes it much more acceptable to many individuals. This also avoids the numerous biblical restrictions placed upon the use of tongues in the assembly (1 Cor. 14), which restrictions, if they are observed, make it impossible to emphasize the gift of tongues. . . . This private use of tongues, therefore, has made much greater penetration into the non-Pentecostal churches than the older mainline Pentecostal approach was able to do.⁶

In summary, we can say that *glossaists* believe that the real gift of tongues manifests itself in incoherent speech or prayer for public or private edification. Therefore, we can also say that *glossaism* has rejected the beliefs that the Christian Church had universally held for over 1600 years on this issue. Essentially every early Church Father, Roman Catholic, Reformer, and Evangelical up to the early 1900's believed that the gift of tongues was the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign human language for the purpose of authenticating new divine revelation, and that it had completely ceased from the early history of the Church.⁷

There is obviously a great difference in how *glossaism* and historic Christianity have interpreted Scripture on this issue. In fact, the views are so incompatible that both cannot be true. For this reason alone, anyone in Christian leadership needs to have a competent understanding of the debate regarding the biblical gift of tongues. Along these lines, D. A. Carson, Professor of New Testament at Trinity, writes:

In the whole range of contemporary Christian theology and personal experience, few topics are currently more important than those associated with what is now commonly called "the Charismatic movement." . . . Whatever their theological commitments, young clergy will wrestle with questions raised by the Charismatic movement as frequently and in some instances as painfully as anything else that comes their way.⁸

B) The Difficulties & Importance of the Tongues Debate

While we believe the Bible has a clear teaching on the gift of tongues that can be understood and taught, we recognize the difficulties in doing so. First of all, the issues are rather complex and not only include the need to accurately interpret the modern "tongues" experience, but also to accurately interpret some of the most obscure passages of Scripture. This explains why godly and good men have come down on several different sides of the issue. Accordingly, what H. Wayne House, Distinguished Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Faith Seminary wrote several years ago is still true today:

Of all the controversial subjects discussed in Christian circles, probably few have received more attention than the subject of tongues. Though the material written on this subject is enormous, much confusion pervades the issue.⁹

Secondly, "tongues" is practiced by many friends we hold near and dear, and to question their experience can obviously strain the

valuable relationships we enjoy with them. A third reason we may hesitate to enter a debate regarding the “tongues” issue is that it is never attractive, nor easy, to critique others, knowing that the weight of our own errors and erroneous beliefs could sink a battleship. No Christian is perfect in their interpretation or practice of Scripture. In addition, it must be admitted that many Christians who practice “tongues” excel other Christians who do not, in even more important areas such as love for God and others, evangelistic zeal, and consistent obedience to God’s word.

While the demand of exceptionally careful study, the risk of offending friends, and the difficulty of critiquing exemplary Christians all persuade us not to enter a debate on “tongues,” there are additional compelling reasons to do so, even beyond God’s desire that we interpret His word accurately.

First, the claims of *glossaists* are intimidating. The suggestion is clear: If you are not believing and experiencing what they are, you are missing out on a world-wide blessing of the Holy Spirit. In general, *glossaists* believe that speaking and/or praying in “tongues” is a particularly divine spiritual experience that God wants all Christians to enjoy, and if they are not, they are spiritually deficient, and possibly living outside of God’s will for them. Accordingly, one of *glossaism’s* foremost theologians, J. Rodman Williams, writes in the well regarded *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*:

The essential [*glossaist’s*] claim about glossolalia is that it is the vehicle of communication par excellence between man and God. . . . [*glossaists*] frequently state that in tongues there is a fulfillment of the intense desire to offer total praise to God. . . . Such prayer is [uniquely] identified with praying in the [Holy] Spirit or with the [Holy] Spirit [cf. Jude 1:20] ¹⁰

Dr. Williams not only implies that tongues is the method by which we can “offer total praise to God,” but goes on to suggest that “singing in tongues” is to be considered the “apex of worship,” as compared with the “more usual [kind of] singing.” ¹¹

Likewise, C. Samuel Storms, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, is typical in describing his practice of “tongues prayer” when he writes:

I want to conclude this discussion of [the validity of] tongues on a personal note by simply saying that I have found this gift to be profoundly helpful in my prayer life. It has served only to deepen my intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ and to enhance my zeal and joy in worship. ¹²

Along the same lines, the very influential Anglican theologian Michael Green, a foremost leader of *charismaticism* writes:

[T]he gift of tongues opens a new dimension to a man's prayer life. He actually longs to pray whereas before it had been an effort. Time seems unimportant, and it will be nothing out of the way for him to spend an hour or two in communion with his Lord. Today, the gift of tongues produces precisely the same effect; a genuine liberty in prayer.

Second, tongues enables a man to praise God at a depth unknown previously. . . . Perhaps Paul's references to singing spiritual songs to the Lord (Eph. 5: 19, Col. 3: 16) allude to singing in tongues; certainly this is a most beautiful and harmonious phenomenon, and elates the soul in worship to a remarkable degree.

But whether the singing is in tongues or no, it is an undeniable fact that when men receive this gift of tongues they find themselves free to praise and thank and adore and glorify their heavenly Father as never before. In charismatic prayer meetings praise is usually the dominant element; in the run-of-the-mill evangelical prayer meeting this is not normally the case. . . .

Third, tongues edifies the individual (I Cor. 14:4). This is not surprising, if it releases the inhibitions which keep us from prayer and praise of God. . . . [I]t is one of the ways of growth in the Christian life for those who have been given this gift. Tongues is given, like the other manifestations of the Spirit, for our profit. . . .

[T]ongues 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. . . . Many people find it a real help in bearing physical pain or mental distress. . . .

Perhaps one of its most important uses is in spiritual warfare. When there is an oppressive sense of evil present, when a ministry of deliverance is being engaged in; then prayer in tongues proves to be a powerful instrument for the Lord the Spirit to use. In Ephesians 6:18 Paul concludes his description of the armour a Christian needs to wear against satanic attack with the injunction to 'pray at all times in the Spirit'. This includes praying at the inspiration of the Spirit in words we understand and in words we do not. ¹³

The big question is obvious: What Christian would not want to “profoundly” improve their “prayer life,” such that “Time seems unimportant, and it will be nothing out of the way . . . to spend an hour or two in communion with [the] Lord,” to “deepen” their “intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ and to enhance” their “zeal and joy in worship,” to find “real help in bearing physical pain or mental distress,” to experience “the vehicle of communication par excellence between man and God,” by which “total praise,” “praying in the Spirit,” and the “apex of worship” can be accomplished, and to have a “powerful instrument for the Lord the Spirit to use” for “spiritual warfare . . . when there is an oppressive sense of evil present”?

And how are those who *do not* practice “speaking” or “praying in tongues” supposed to feel about their own relatively normal prayer and devotional life? If what *glossaism* claims is indeed what God intended to provide through the gift of tongues, and it is available to all as they say, then we should all be desperately seeking it! And if we cannot get it, we should be deeply disappointed to miss out on such a great spiritual blessing.

Simply put, *glossaism* is claiming that the spirituality of *hundreds of millions* of Christians now and throughout over 1600 years of Church history is rather pathetic and deficient. . . . which makes one wonder why the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians to “**eagerly desire the greater gifts**” (12:31) and clearly deny tongues was one of them.

Are the rest of us really missing something that God intends for us to have? The claims of *glossaism* understandably cause even the most mature believers to question their own spirituality. The well-known Bible teacher John MacArthur reflects this concern well when he says: “It seems that the Charismatic movement has separated the Christian community into the spiritual “haves” and “have-nots.” He then goes on to freely admit:

Although I have devoted my life to preaching sound biblical doctrine that centers on the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer’s life, I must confess that by the Charismatics’ definition, I am among the “have-nots.” And I admit to having asked myself, *Are all those people who are supposedly having all those amazing experiences for real? Could it be that I’m missing out on what God is doing? Are my Charismatic brothers and sisters reaching a higher level in their walk with Christ?*¹⁴

Anyone who loves God had better have an answer to that question.

In addition to the clear assertions that tongues is a superior method of prayer, worship, and spiritual edification, it is common

for Pentecostal brethren in particular to insist that "speaking in tongues" is the only legitimate sign of a Christian being "baptized," or in full possession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ Accordingly, Stanley M. Horton, Distinguished Professor of Bible and Theology Emeritus at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary claims: "The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance."¹⁶ Likewise, another well-regarded Pentecostal professor, William W. Menzies, states that the belief that tongues speaking is *the* sign of Spirit baptism, is also *the* unique factor that makes one a Pentecostal.¹⁷

This is obviously a very serious claim, and several years ago the influential British preacher, D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) shared some of its harm when he wrote:

When people are told that unless they speak in tongues they have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit, many who have been baptized with the Holy Spirit are made to feel very unhappy. They say, 'But I have never spoken in tongues, and I am told that because of that, I have never been baptized with the Spirit.' But they had thought that they were, they had every reason for thinking that they were, and thus they are made unhappy. . . .

But still more serious is the fact that having been made unhappy in this way by this false teaching, they then, of course, become much more open than they were before to psychological pressure, let alone the influence of evil spirits. They are so anxious to have this 'essential' evidence that they do everything they can to speak in tongues and, of course, after a while some of them begin to do so. But the question is--what has made them do so?

Others remain unhappy and miserable, which is quite wrong and false. It is all due to this one teaching. It is to fly in the face of the Scriptures and the history of the church to say that unless a man has spoken in tongues, he has never been baptized with the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

We see then that it is not only those outside of *glossaism* who are intimidated by its claims, but perhaps especially those inside of it. George Gardiner, a Pastor and former *glossaist* who left the Pentecostal movement relates the possibly tragic emotional and psychological consequences of this movement:

Such experiences not only give Satan an opening he is quick to exploit, they can be psychologically damaging. . . . [*glossaist*] writers are constantly warning tongues-speakers that they will suffer a letdown. This is ascribed to the devil

and the reader is urged to get refilled as soon as possible. . . . So the seeker for experiences goes back through the ritual again and again, but begins to discover something; ecstatic experience, like drug-addiction, requires larger and larger doses to satisfy. Sometimes the bizarre is introduced. . . .

Eventually there is a crisis and a decision is made; he will sit in the back seats and be a spectator, "fake it," or go on in the hope that everything will eventually be as it was. The most tragic decision is to quit and in the quitting abandon all things spiritual as fraudulent. The spectators are frustrated, the fakers suffer guilt, the hoping are pitiable and the quitters are a tragedy. No, such movements are not harmless!¹⁹

If the claim that one does not fully possess the Holy Spirit if they do not have the gift of tongues were not bad enough, others in *glossaism* would have us doubt our salvation if we do not possess the gift. Accordingly, on the website of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International we read in answer to the question, "Why should I speak in tongues?":

No doubt that is a question that has been asked by millions of Christians through the centuries [no, actually just the last one], and we believe that knowing the answer is vital for maximizing the quality of one's life as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? The primary reason, as a study of Scripture will clearly show, is: speaking in tongues is the only absolute proof a Christian has that he is born again and guaranteed a parking place in Paradise, i.e., everlasting life (2 Cor. 1:21, 22; Eph. 1:13, 14; 1 John 3:24). Speaking in tongues is the only valid external, tangible evidence in the senses realm that the internal, intangible gift of the holy spirit was shed abroad in one's heart at the moment of his new birth.²⁰

Obviously, then, the debate concerning the biblical nature of the gift of tongues is a vital and important one in contemporary Christianity. Many millions of Christians claim it is *the* proof of whether or not one has been baptized with the Holy Spirit. *Hundreds of millions* of Christians claim that the gift of tongues is a special, more intimate way to pray, a source of the most intense spiritual edification, and therefore every Christian can and should possess this gift. Therefore, if *glossaism* is right on this point, and historic Christianity is wrong, then *hundreds of millions* of Christians have unnecessarily failed to fully experience the Holy Spirit, are unfortunately praying in an inferior way, and missing out on one of the most valuable spiritual gifts and experiences available today.

On the other hand If *glossaism* has been wrong about the gift of tongues, and the historic view of the Church has been correct all along, then *hundreds of millions* of Christians are living in deep deception regarding their spirituality. Accordingly, *hundreds of millions* of Christians have unnecessarily and illegitimately boasted of a gift they do not have, faked that they do, intimidated others to as well, misrepresented God, and expended a lot of energy on something the Apostle Paul said left the “**mind . . . unfruitful** [*akarpos*: useless, barren]” (1 Cor 14:14), something that, as we have demonstrated elsewhere, is not Christian, but rather dangerous.²¹

Which is why we have argued as well that Christ Himself condemned the mindless practice of modern “tongues praying” when He commanded us not to “**keep on babbling like pagans**” “**when you pray**” (Matt 6:7).²² Praying in gibberish is precisely what occurred in the Greek mystery religions of Christ’s day, occurred as well in the Corinthian church, continues to occur around the world in many non-Christian and even occultic environments today, and all of which is absolutely indistinguishable from the “tongues prayer” practiced in modern *glossaism*.

Because most Christians only observe the modern version of tongues in a church setting, it is erroneously assumed that it is a uniquely Christian practice. On the contrary, professional linguists have observed “tongues speaking” and “tongues prayer” all over the world in many different environments, including demonic ones. “Tongues” as practiced in *glossaism* is also practiced by contemporary cults, witch doctors, fortune tellers, Buddhists, and New Agers. Accordingly, we read in the secular standard reference work *Encyclopedia of Religion*:

Glossolalia (from the Greek *glosse*, “tongue, language,” and *lalein*, “to talk”) is a nonordinary speech behavior that is institutionalized as a religious ritual in numerous Western and non-Western religious communities. Its worldwide distribution attests to its antiquity, as does its mention in ancient documents. . . . There are references to it in the [Hindu] Vedas (c. 1000 BC), in Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, and in Tibetan Tantric writings. Traces of it can be found in the litanies (*dhikrs*) of some orders of the Islamic Sufi mystics. . . .

[Tongues speaking] occurred in some of the ancient Greek religions and in various primitive religions. . . . Paul urged restraint in the practice . . . since such a spectacular spiritual gift could be abused. Edification, as opposed to personal satisfaction, was set as the test of acceptable glossolalia. If the meaning could not be disclosed, Paul regarded it with suspicion. . . .

In the circumpolar region, many shamans [witch doctors], among the Intuit [Eskimo] . . . use their religious ritual's secret languages that consist of a mixture of nonsense syllables. . . . [T]hese secret trance dialects are taught by the master shamans to their neophytes. . . . From Africa we have reports of a secret religious trance language used exclusively by women. . . .

When speaking in tongues . . . if the pronouncement is in nonsense syllables, as, for instance, among Christians speaking in tongues or among the nomadic, reindeer-hunting Chukchi of Siberia, an "interpretation" may be provided. . . .

The case of Anneliese Michel brings up the question of what kinds of religious experience are commonly expressed by glossolalia. In her case, the experience was that of [demonic] possession, and glossolalia was the voice, the "language," of the demons that she reported were possessing her.

Possession is one of the most frequent ritual occasions for the use of glossolalia. In possession, an entity from the sacred dimension of reality is experienced as penetrating the respective person . . . for instance, those of the dead of the Trobriand Islanders, ancestral spirits in Africa, and various spirits in Haitian Voodoo—have pronounced personality traits that are expressed in glossolalia. . . .

Communication by glossolalia is instituted not only with unfriendly beings, of course. On a tape recording made in Borneo a female healer can be heard calling her helping spirit [and this is a *friendly* being?]. In the *zar* cult of Ethiopia, the shamans [essentially witch doctors] talk to the *zars* [spirits] in a "secret language." The shamans of the Semai of Malaysia use glossolalia to invite the "nephews of the gods" to a feast, and the Yanomamo Indians of Amazonia chant while in a trance to their *hekura* demons, calling them to come live in their chests.²³

Obviously, then, what can be observed in many churches around the world, can also be witnessed in a variety of non-Christian contexts as well. Which makes it all the more important to distinguish the common and ancient pagan practice of praying in a spontaneous, obscure, meaningless "tongue," from the biblical gift of miraculously speaking in known human languages.

Indeed, the debate regarding *glossaism* is worth careful study because either *hundreds of millions* of Christians holding to historic Christianity need to be passionately pursuing, seeking, and learning this gift with all their heart in order to communicate with and experience God in a greater way, or *hundreds of millions* of

Christians in *glossaism* need to humbly and courageously repent in order to avoid continuing to sin against God. Those are precisely the options if an honest assessment is given to what both sides of the debate are claiming.

Most will understandably say we have crossed a line to call *glossaism* a sin against God. We say this because claiming to have a spiritual gift you do not have is *lying*. Claiming a more intimate relationship with God because of a spiritual gift you do not have is arrogant. Imposing the need for this gift on others is selfish. Praying to God in a way that He does not condone, and which Jesus would seem to have even condemned is sinful.²⁴

In the next several chapters of *Knowing Our God* we hope to answer the following questions, among others. Did God intend the gift of tongues to accomplish all of what modern practitioners claim, and is it doing so today? If tongues is such a wonderful *gift* from God, then why is it almost exclusively confined to only certain kinds of churches and denominations? Is the modern version of tongues the same as that described in Scripture? Did Jesus condemn the modern version of tongues? Does the Bible contain a clear and authoritative teaching on the issue of tongues?

This last question is an important one. How else are we going to know whether *hundreds of millions* of those following historic Christianity actually need to seek the gift of tongues, or whether the *hundreds of millions* of Christians committed to *glossaism* need to renounce and repent of it?

All of which makes it surprising that even the rightly and highly respected Pentecostal NT scholar Gordon Fee would write:

The question as to whether the "speaking in tongues" in contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic communities is the same in kind as that in the Pauline churches [i.e. described in the Bible] is moot-and probably somewhat irrelevant. There is simply no way to know. As an experienced phenomenon [today], it is analogous to theirs [how does he know that?], meaning that it is understood to be a supernatural activity of the Spirit which functions in many of the same ways [how do they know that?], and for many of its practitioners has value similar to that described by Paul.²⁵

On the contrary, it is confidently (although not arrogantly) asserted here that the Bible *does* provide clear teaching on the issue of the spiritual gift of tongues. It is additionally suggested that our friends in *glossaism* have misinterpreted both the Bible and their experience in this matter. More than that, there is nothing more foundational to the history, doctrine, and unique practice and spirituality of the "charismatic" and "Pentecostal" movements than

“praying in tongues.” If this is in fact unbiblical, then all of the claims to a unique history, doctrine, and spirituality in these movements is a sham. If their foundational experience and understanding of “tongues” was and is unbiblical, why would we trust them on their views of healing or the gift of prophecy? These are admittedly serious claims on our part, but we desire to speak the truth in love (cf. Eph 4:15), and leave it to the reader to decide if we have succeeded in both.

Our discussion regarding the gift of tongues will begin in the next two chapters by discussing the biblical characteristics of the gift, most clearly described in Acts, and reflected in 1 Corinthians as well. In subsequent chapters, we take on the difficult task of correctly interpreting 1 Corinthians 14, and will discuss various other passages of Scripture that *glossaism* claims pertain to the gift of tongues. Then in chapter 12.13 we will document the historical cessation of the gift of tongues and offer some legitimate and even alarming explanations for the modern version. Read the following and study carefully on one of the most important and difficult theological topics of our day.

Pastoral Practices

- Have you sufficiently protected your flock from the possible intimidation of the modern “tongues” movement? While a study as in depth as what is provided in this section of *Knowing Our God* may not be necessary, some teaching on the biblical and historical truth regarding this controversy should be provided so that our people know what gifts of the Holy Spirit really look like and can see a sobering example of how fraud and deceit can enter the Church.
- If you come to the same conclusions regarding the modern “tongues” phenomenon as we do, what should be your response to those who visit your church from churches which are a part of this movement. First, we recommend being up front on your church’s website about your position on this issue. You can graciously but firmly let people know that they will not have the freedom to exercise their “gift” in your congregation. For those whose identity has become wrapped up in this issue, this will be helpful to them, and it is very unlikely that you could persuade them otherwise.
- As for those who have come from “tongues” practicing churches, but for whom it is not a big issue, there is more opportunity to

help them in this area. Perhaps they are very discouraged in their faith because of all the unbiblical expectations that have been placed upon them from such churches. Be a church that truly lives in the power of the Holy Spirit and teach them likewise.

Extras & Endnotes

Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we thank you for giving us your written Word by which we may navigate through all the deception and false teaching that has infiltrated your people. Give us humility, grace, and courage to understand your Word, and teach it with love on even topics as difficult as "tongues." And we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who have been deceived, disillusioned, and spiritually damaged because of unbiblical teaching and practice on this issue. May you restore them and renew them in their understanding of what intimate prayer with you is really like, and what the ministry, gifts, and power of the Holy Spirit really are. Amen.

Gauging Your Grasp

- 1) What do we mean by *glossaism* and why do we use this term?
- 2) What two forms does the phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" manifest itself today?
- 3) How is this different from how the gift was viewed throughout Church history?
- 4) Why do we claim that a study of the gift of tongues is worth careful debate? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 5) What are the two options in the debate over tongues that we suggest? Do you agree or disagree and why?
- 6) What does John MacArthur mean when he says: "It seems that the Charismatic movement has separated the Christian community into the spiritual "haves" and "have-nots."

Publications & Particulars

¹ By modern *charismaticism* we are primarily referring to what is commonly labeled the “charismatic” movement that began with the Pentecostals in the early 1900’s, spread into denominational churches in the 1960’s and 70’s, and has merged with what is referred to as the Third Wave churches today. Pentecostal churches include Assembly of God, Church of God, Open Bible, Apostolic, Foursquare Gospel, and Full Gospel. Third Wave churches include Vineyard and a variety of independent congregations.

We thank God for all He has done through the “charismatic” movement, and for the dear Christian brothers and sisters who would claim membership in it. However, throughout *Knowing Our God (KOG)* we refrain from referring to this movement as “charismatic,” because this erroneously implies a uniqueness and even superiority in Christian grace (*charis*), and by further implication, a superior possession or experience of the Holy Spirit.

Surely no right-minded “charismatic” would desire to claim such a superiority over their Christian brothers and sisters, especially since they cannot demonstrate one. Biblically speaking, being “**led by the Spirit**,” experiencing His power, and living “**not under law**” but by “**grace [charis]**” is most clearly manifested in the “**fruit of the Spirit**” which the Apostle Paul describes as “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**” (Gal 5:4, 18, 22-3). “Charismatic” Christians in general are not superior in these virtues of love and holiness compared to other Christians, and these virtues are the real essence of Christian *charisma*, making all obedient Christians true “charismatics,” not just a particular sect.

In fact, the greatest and most important uniqueness of *charismatic* churches over other authentic Christian churches is not their love or holiness, but rather an emphasis on, and practice of: 1) emotional worship, 2) speaking and/or praying in an incoherent tongue, 3) claims to direct divine revelation through spiritual gifts such as prophecy, and 4) claims to a greater abundance of miracles in general through the gifts of healing and miracle working.

Therefore, throughout *KOG* we use the terms *emotionalism* (see chapters 4.8-11), *glossaism* (Gr. glossa: “tongue,” see Book 12: *The Truth About Tongues*), *prophetism* (see Book 9: *God’s Prophets*), and *super-supernaturalism* (see chapters 10.14-16) to refer to these distinctives respectively, while recognizing that they may exist elsewhere as well. Accordingly, we believe this allows us to address the areas of concern we have regarding the movement, and avoid speaking critically of the movement as a whole, which has many good, although not unique, attributes as well.

Likewise, we refrain from referring to those Christians who would differ from “charismatics” as “non-charismatics,” erroneously implying again that the latter is somehow lacking in grace. Rather, those who oppose the sometimes bizarre worship of *emotionalism*, the obscure utterances of *glossaism*, the extra-biblical revelations of *prophetism*, and the

miracle-a-minute mindset of *super-supernaturalism* are better labeled as *historicists*. This reflects the fact that *for at least 1600 years of Church history, the great majority belief and practice of God's people was opposed to all of the uniquenesses that the "charismatic" movement claims today.*

It is a historical fact that miraculous gifts such as healing, tongues, and prophecy ceased functioning in the church in the fourth century. Accordingly, the very few people since then who have promoted bizarre forms of worship, obscure utterances in prayer, claims to extra-biblical revelation, and miracle working abilities, were always thought to be deceived and dangerous, and not accepted as biblical Christians. What those in *charismaticism* also refuse to admit, or take seriously enough, is that the modern versions of the miraculous gifts being claimed do not match the attributes of their biblical counterparts. For a great deal of discussion on these matters see the books in this Volume 2 of KOG.

- ² Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* (Hendrickson, 1998), 303
- ³ Doug Bannister, a prominent E-Free pastor claims to practice tongues and promotes it in his book, *The Word and Power Church* (Zondervan, 1999).
- ⁴ Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Kregel Resources, 1996), 120. If we only had one book to recommend on the topic of the miraculous gifts this one would be it.
- ⁵ *Glossolalia* is the technical term for the spontaneous, obscure, and incoherent utterances observed particularly in religious settings from ancient history, to the modern times, and throughout the world. It is derived from the Greek words *glossa* (tongue, language), and *lalos* (speak), and literally means "language speaking." However, professional linguists agree that modern glossolalia is not a real human language (see chapter 12.2).
Accordingly, while *glossolalia* is an apt term for the incoherent utterances occurring in the modern tongues movement, *xenolalia* (derived from the Greek *zenos*: "foreign"), is commonly used to refer to the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign human language which you have not learned naturally, and is therefore a better technical term for the biblical gift of tongues
- ⁶ Edgar, 165.
- ⁷ See discussion of the cessation of the gift of tongues in the early Church see section 12.13.B-C.
- ⁸ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Baker, 1987), 11.
- ⁹ H. Wayne House, "Tongues and the Mystery Religions at Corinth," *BSac* 140, [1983], 134.
- ¹⁰ J. Rodman Williams, "Charismatic Movement," in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, Walter Elwell, ed., (Baker, 1984), 206. Underlining added.

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- ¹¹ Ibid. 207.
- ¹² C. Samuel Storms, "A Third Wave View," in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, Wayne Grudem ed. (Zondervan, 1996), 222.
- ¹³ Michael Green, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (Eerdmans, 2004), 198-200.
- ¹⁴ John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992), 21-22, italics in original.
- ¹⁵ Accordingly, Presbyterian theologian Donald Bloesch writes:
 A second hallmark of Pentecostalism is its emphasis on glossolalia as the confirmatory sign of the gift of the Spirit. Yet even here there are noteworthy differences among Pentecostals. Some contend that speaking in tongues constitutes the evidence of Spirit baptism and others that it is only an evidence or even a possible evidence. . . . At the same time, one cannot deny that original or classical Pentecostalism assigns a prominent role to speaking in tongues and that the experience of Spirit baptism is commonly assumed to be a glossolalic experience. (*The Holy Spirit* [InterVarsity, 2000], 190.
- ¹⁶ Stanley M. Horton and William W. Menzies, *Bible Doctrines: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Logion Press, 1999), 134.
- ¹⁷ William Menzies, *Anointed to Serve* (Gospel Publishing House, 1971), 9.
- ¹⁸ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning the Gifts Spirit* (Harold Shaw, 1985), 145-6.
- ¹⁹ George E. Gardiner, *The Corinthian Catastrophe* (Kregel, 1974), 55.
- ²⁰ See online at <http://www.truthortradition.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=83>.
- ²¹ For further discussion on the unbiblical nature of not praying with our mind see section 3.18.A.4.
- ²² For further discussion of what we perceive as Christ's condemnation of the modern version of tongues see section 12.11.C.
- ²³ *Encyclopedia of Religion*, "Glossolalia," Mircea Eliade ed., 16 vols. (Macmillan, 1987), V:562-565. (underlining added for emphasis). Edgar claims that the 14th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* also describes some obviously demonically controlled instances of tongues speaking (219).
- ²⁴ Obviously our claim that Jesus condemned the pagan practice of praying in unintelligible gibberish needs support which we offer in section 12.11.C
- ²⁵ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994), 890 n. 17.