

THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF “SPEAKING IN TONGUES”¹

THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS OF TONGUES SPEAKING. The following biblical references are ALL the places in the New Testament where tongues speaking is mentioned, implied (?), or actually stated to have occurred:

- 1) Acts: 2:1-13; 10:44-48; 19:1-6
- 2) Mark 16:17
- 3) I Corinthians 12-14
- 4) Acts 8: 14-17 (This passage does not specifically mention tongues speaking, but it may have occurred there?)
- 5) “Some charismatics point to Romans 8:26-27 as another New Testament reference to tongues...That is a tortured interpretation of the passage and an unscholarly handling of the Greek text. Nothing in the Greek suggests the idea of praying in tongues” (MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, [hereafter often abbreviated as CC, footnote, p. 224])

THE PURPOSES BEHIND THE GIFT OF TONGUES:

It was a final sign to the unbelieving Jews. It was a last chance, if you please, for Israel to repent of its rejection of their Messiah and embrace Christ as Messiah-otherwise judgment was on the way! **I Cor. 14:20-22 cf. Isa. 28:7-12; Dt. 28:49; & Jer. 5:15.**

“Basically, the purpose of tongues as a sign is threefold. They are a sign of cursing (#1 above), a sign of blessing (see #2, #3 & #5 below), and a sign of authority (see #4 below)... Paul drew a conclusion from the Old Testament text. His conclusion was *that tongues are not for believing people; they are for unbelieving people*. What unbelieving people? The phrase ‘this people’ in verse 21 is referring to Israel, **so tongues was specifically a sign to unbelieving Israel...**In Isaiah 28 we find ourselves in the Southern Kingdom of Judah during the reign of King Hezekiah... In verse 7 Isaiah finds the leaders of Israel, the prophets and the priests in a drunken stupor... Notice the ugliness of verse 8... So (Isaiah) delivered his message of rebuke and of coming judgment (to them). Do you know what their reaction was? They mocked him, scorned him, scolded him, and derided him...(notice) verse 9, ‘Whom shall he teach knowledge?... Only babies! Why? Because he always goes precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little. He must think we’re babies.’ ...They mocked him... (so) In verses 11-12 Isaiah says that God ‘with stammering lips and another tongue will...speak to this people... *In other words God said, ‘You wouldn’t hear the simple, repeated, childlike message of Isaiah, so I’m going to talk to you in a language you’ll never understand.’* He was referring to the babbling Babylonians who had already encompassed their city...And when they began to hear that unintelligible language of Babylonia, they would know that the judgment of God had fallen...The people of Israel had been warned before the warning of Isaiah (cf. Dt. 28:49)... this warning could have reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70...There was also a similar warning in the sixth century by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 5:15)...

“In the Old Testament then, God had clearly pointed out to the people of Israel that when they were going to be judged, there would be a sign. That sign was that they would hear a language they couldn’t understand... When the Jewish people heard a multitude of languages they didn’t understand on the day of Pentecost, they should have known that the judgment of God was imminent. And it was! In A.D. 70 the Romans wiped out Jerusalem...

It was the way the believers knew the Holy Spirit had come and begun the special relationship that Jesus had told them to wait for, before attempting to begin fulfilling the Great Commission. (cf. **Jn. 7:39; 14:16; 16:7; Acts 1:4-5 cf. v.8**).

It also provided divine confirmation of who could be part of God’s family i.e. anyone who would come to Christ for salvation. (e.g. Jews-Acts 2; Samaritans-Acts 8 [*if* tongues occurred there?]; Gentiles-Acts 10; A little band of “*OT saints in the NT era*” era-Acts 19).

It was part of a “package” of sign gifts (or supernatural gifts) that God gave to the apostles to validate & authenticate them and their message. Heb. 2:3-4; II Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19; Acts 14:3 cf. 14:6-18.

¹This material is an excerpt from my compilation titled “*Charismatic Critique*.” Nearly everything contained in these notes has been taken from one or more of several of John MacArthur’s books. In my opinion, his book “*Charismatic Chaos*” (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992) is probably the best single critical evaluation of the entire Charismatic movement and its various teachings. –Mike Edwards. Compiled 1999, revised June, 2006, 2010 & 2021.

“Who were the men of God who spoke of the curse and the judgment? Who were the men of God who spoke of the blessing to come to all nations? The apostles and the prophets. *And it was to them that God gave the ability to speak these languages as an authenticating, validating sign that what they were saying was indeed the truth.* To the Jewish mind, the idea that God would make such a transition would be so shocking, so shattering, so incomprehensible,... that there would have to be some kind of reinforcement that what they were saying was true. Therefore God gave them the ability to speak these languages... remember it as the ABCs of the purpose of tongues: authority, blessing, and cursing. The purpose of tongues was not private devotions (see below under “C” & “D”), evangelism, or a proof of ‘Spirit baptism...Once the transition was made the church was born, Jerusalem was destroyed, and the sign was no longer necessary... When I take a trip I rely on signs to tell me how close I am to my destination...Once I arrive... however, the signs will stop, because the purpose for the signs, as they point ahead to something, cease once the destination is reached. *Tongues were a sign. They pointed to something--a curse of God upon Israel. And once the curse came, the sign was no longer necessary.*” (MacArthur, Speaking in Tongues (hereafter abbreviated as S/T), pp. 135-136).

It inaugurated the Church age. Acts 1:4-5, 8; cf. Rom. 9-11. “When tongues occurred at Pentecost, the message to Israel was: ‘God is not going to work exclusively through one nation any longer--speaking only one language. God’s not going to favor one people any longer... (Eph. 3:2-6) ...(so) Primarily tongues are as a sign of the curse on Israel. But notice the residual effect of that curse is the blessing that comes to the whole world.’” (ibid, p. 134).

Additionally, there is the possibility (??) that the gift of tongues was used by Paul (& perhaps other apostles??) to proclaim the gospel to people groups whose language Paul did not know? cf. I Cor. 14:18-25. We really don’t have any direct confirmation of that, but it is possible.

THE NATURE OF TONGUES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. Charismatic proponents not withstanding, every indication is that the New Testament tongues which were spoken were always real languages-not some sort of gibberish, ecstatic speech or “angel talk.” “‘Tongues’ is from the Greek word *glossa*, which, like our word tongue, can refer either to the physical organ or to a language. Paul is clearly referring to a gift of languages.” (ibid, p. 225).

Unquestionably the tongues spoken in Acts (2, 10, 19) were genuine, known languages: (1) Note the reaction of the men from the various nations in Acts 2:6-11 who heard them, (2) “Language” (“tongue”-KJV) in 2:6, 8 is the normal word for a human language (*glossa*). “Nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of tongues is anything other than human languages. Nor is there any suggestion that the true tongues described in I Corinthians 12:14 were materially different from the miraculous languages described in Acts 2 at Pentecost. The Greek word in both places is *glossa*. In Acts it is clear that the disciples were speaking in known languages...Luke went on to name some fifteen different countries and areas whose languages were being spoken (vv. 8-11).” (Ibid, p. 226), (3) “Furthermore, the Greek word *dialektos*, from which we get the English word ‘dialect,’ is also used in reference to the languages in Acts 2:6, 8.” (ibid). (4) Note also I Cor. 14:10, where the languages (tongues) being discussed are clearly known, natural human languages!

“BUT WEREN’T THE TONGUES IN CORINTH DIFFERENT THAN THE TONGUES SPOKEN IN THE BOOK OF ACTS?”

It’s a documented, well established fact that much of the alleged tongues speaking going on today is linguistic gibberish, and that it has been studied and shown to not possess even the rudimentary characteristics intrinsic to ALL human languages. Consequently, *some charismatics have tried to advance the idea that the tongues spoken in Acts was different than the tongues spoken in I Corinthians* (i.e. that the tongues mentioned in I Corinthians refers [sic] to an unknown, unearthly, angel language or “angel talk” that believers can use in their private prayer times!) For instance: “Donald Gee, a well-known charismatic, wrote the following statement: ‘*The revealed purposes of the gift of tongues are chiefly devotional, and we do well to emphasize the fact.*’ (!) ...Another charismatic, Larry Christenson, wrote, ‘*One speaks in tongues, for the most part, in his private devotions. This is by far its most important use and value.*’ [sic]...**That is the opposite of what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians.**” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 90).

Advocates of this view attempt to build a case for that position by appealing to several verses in I Cor. 13 & 14:

I Cor. 13:1 Here Paul refers to “**the tongues of men, or angels.**” “What did Paul mean by the ‘tongues of...angels?’...most charismatics believe that the gift of tongues today is a private prayer language, a heavenly language known only to God, celestial speech, or some other kind of unearthly idiom. There is no warrant in the text itself for such a view, however. Paul was making a hypothetical case, just as in the subsequent verses, where he speaks about knowing all mysteries and knowledge (even Paul could not literally make that claim)... Paul was speaking theoretically, suggesting that even if those things were true, without love they would be meaningless. To

make his point about the necessity for love, Paul was trying to stretch his examples to the outer limits” (Ibid, pp. 225-226). What they fail to understand is that in those verses **Paul was using irony, hyperbole, exaggeration, &/or sarcasm to make his points!** Paul was not teaching in 13:1 that there is actually an “angel talk!” He was simply using exaggeration to get his point across (cf. 13:2-3 “*all knowledge,*” “*know all mysteries,*” “*have all faith,*” “*give all my possessions to the poor,*” “*deliver my body to be burned*”). “Besides, there is no evidence in Scripture that angels use a heavenly language. Whenever angels appear in Scripture, they communicate in normal human language (e.g. Luke 1:11-20, 26-37; 2:8-14)” (Ibid).

The term “unknown” in reference to tongues in I Corinthians 14 (KJV). Charismatics also appeal to the fact that the King James Version of I Corinthians 14 “...repeatedly uses the expression ‘an unknown tongue.’ That, they say, describes a language that is not of this world. *The word unknown, however, was supplied by translators and does not appear in the Greek text.* That is why the King James Version shows the word in italics.”²” (Ibid)

I Cor. 14:2, 4, 13-14, 28. Ecstatic (unknown) tongues advocates also appeal to phrases contained in these verses (“*speaks to God...edifies himself...my spirit prays... let him speak to himself and to God*”) for support for their private prayer tongue belief. However, in regard to Paul’s comment (v.2) “‘For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God [lit., ‘a god’];...Paul was saying, ‘You people with your pagan ecstasies are not doing what all spiritual gifts were given to do--minister (or speak) to men. Rather, you are all wrapped up in speaking pagan mysteries in ecstatic speech to some god... Paul’s not referring to the mysteries (Gk., *musterion*) of God or the mysteries that he taught; he’s referring to the mysteries of paganism.’” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 86)

If Paul’s words were not outright condemnation (comment above), **then it appears that he was using sarcasm in verses 2 & 28.** “Note that in 1 Corinthians 14:2 Paul was criticizing the Corinthians for using their ‘gift of tongues’ to speak to God and not to men...Paul’s comment is not suggesting that tongues should be used as a ‘prayer language’; *he was using irony,* pointing out the futility of speaking in tongues without an interpreter, because only God would know if anything was said.” (ibid, p. 228).

Paul does speak of edification in 14:4, so tongues advocates try to say that that verse refers to a “private prayer language” with which believers can edify themselves during their personal devotional times. “How could Paul be using hyperbole or sarcasm there?”, they ask. But such individuals are apparently unaware of the following facts regarding the term edification:

When Paul speaks of edification, it does not always have a positive connotation. In fact edification is used in a negative sense earlier in this very letter (**I Cor. 8:10**). “In 1 Corinthians 8:10, for example, the same Greek word is used to speak of ‘*strengthening someone’s conscience to do evil.*” (ibid, p. 229)

I Cor. 10:24 also puts the lie to the idea that Paul was serious &/or was commending personal, self-edification! (In this verse) “Paul was saying, ‘All things might be OK for you, but don’t do them because they’re OK for you--do them because they’re going to mean something to someone else.’” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 91)

“**Paul was not commending the use of tongues for self-edification, but condemning people who were using the gift in violation of its purpose and in disregard of the principle of love** (‘**[Love] does not seek its own.**’-**I Cor. 13:5**). The word ‘edify’ in 14:4 means ‘to build up.’ It might carry either a positive or a negative connotation (see above), depending on the context.” (Ibid) **Similarly, in 14:13-14,** Paul’s point is that if you don’t understand a foreign language yet are speaking it, you are doing something, but it is of no benefit to you & you should avoid it! cf. 14:15.

THE PURPOSE OF ALL SPIRITUAL GIFTS IS TO BENEFIT THE BODY OF CHRIST. SPIRITUAL GIFTS WERE NEVER INTENDED FOR, NOR ARE THEY GIVEN, FOR OUR OWN BENEFIT!

In response to the above-mentioned erroneous statements that there is such a thing as a “private prayer tongue” that God gives believers to edify themselves and use in their devotions, *it must be clearly and unequivocally pointed out that neither tongues, nor any other spiritual gift was ever intended for private devotional use, or to be personally beneficial to the possessor of the gift!*

²“Glossa always appears in the plural form throughout Acts, indicating multiple languages. In 1 Corinthians 14, however, Paul employed both the singular and plural forms. One possible explanation is that when he used the singular ‘tongue’ in verses 2, 4, 13, 14, and 19, he was referring to the counterfeit pagan babbling that some of the Corinthian believers were evidently using instead of the true gift of languages. Meaningless, ecstatic speech was fundamentally all the same, so the plural form was unnecessary. When Paul was clearly referring to the authentic gift of languages, however, he used the plural ‘tongues.’ The only exception is 1 Corinthians 14:27, where Paul describes one man speaking one language, so the singular ‘tongue’ was necessary there, too.” (MacArthur, CC, footnote, pp. 226-227)

ALL spiritual gifts are designed and intended to edify and bless OTHERS, not ourselves! - I Cor. 10:24; 12:7; 14:12, 26; I Pet. 4:10. To have and use a supposed “prayer tongue” for the personal benefit of the possessor is totally contrary to Scripture. “Spiritual gifts were never intended to be used for God’s benefit, or for the benefit of the gifted individual. Peter made that clear in 1 Peter 4:10: ‘As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another.’” (Ibid, p. 228) “So (while) its being said that speaking in tongues is a new way to have your devotions, a new way to edify yourself... In the first nineteen verses of 1 Corinthians 14, Paul basically chides the Corinthians for their selfish use of tongues... (in verse 2)...Paul was telling the Corinthians, ‘When you speak in ecstatic gibberish, you are doing what is done in the mystery religions by people who are speaking to their gods. This is not the design of any spiritual gift, because all spiritual gifts are designed to speak to men or to serve others.’...Paul says that the gifts were give to profit all (12:7). They had misused this gift.” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 124).

“... (and) No spiritual gift was ever given for the purpose of ministering to God. All spiritual gifts are given to build up the Body of Christ by ministering to the members of the Body. God doesn’t need us to minister a spiritual gift to Him, because He’s not incomplete...”

“If you study prayer in the New Testament, you will never find a verse that tells you to pray to God in an unknown language. When Jesus laid out the model for prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**, there wasn’t any gibberish or ecstatic language involved. (In fact, in verse 7 He had just condemned such an approach to prayer.)” (MacArthur, S/T, pp. 86-87, 125). I might add that *the whole mentality that it’s “more spiritual” to be mindless and not know what you are saying is false!* As one has observed “...there is never a time in the Word of God when God wants us to be mindless. There is never a time when God wants us to function on pure emotion without understanding...In fact, in **Matthew 22:37** Jesus says, ‘**Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind**’” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 112-emphasis in the original)

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE USE OF THE GIFT OF TONGUES-- ASSUMING (for the sake of argument) THAT THE GIFT IS STILL IN OPERATION TODAY. I Cor. 12 & 14

(Note: The late Dr. Charles W. Smith wrote an essay in early 1970’s on I Corinthians 14, in the theological journal “*Biblical Viewpoint*” [Focus on I Corinthians, Bob Jones University, Greenville, SC] highlighting these same points).

- 1) **Believers do NOT get a choice of which gift they get**-The Holy Spirit determines that. -**I Cor. 12:11, 18**. The idea that Christians can go forward in a church service, or in a similar fashion deliberately and purposely receive a particular spiritual gift, especially tongues, is totally unbiblical!
- 2) **Everybody does not get the same gift - I Cor. 12:14-27, 30**. The teaching that while believers receive various spiritual gifts, EVERY believer should (must?) receive the gift of tongues too, is unbiblical! “...in 12:30 Paul says, ‘Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?’ The implied answer is obviously NO (!)...

(So) *Why does Paul say, ‘I wish you all spoke in tongues,’ (14:5a) if he knows they can’t?...(answer): he is speaking in hyperbole. In 1 Corinthians 7:1-6 Paul talks about marriage... in verse 7 he says, ‘I would that all men were even as I myself.’ In other words, ‘I wish you were all single.’ Now is that an actual divine mandate? No. That’s wishing the impossible for the sake of emphasis--which is exactly what Paul is doing in 1 Corinthians 14... Paul was using hyperbole as an emphasis. He’s balancing his strong words denying the primacy of tongues to emphasize the fact that there (was) a true gift.” (MacArthur, *Speaking in Tongues*, pp. 92-93). Many charismatics who proclaim that every believer should speak in tongues, say that that is the sign that they have been “baptized” by the Spirit, have “received” the Spirit or have been “filled” with the Spirit. However, “In 1 Corinthians 12 all are baptized by the Spirit; in Acts 2 people receive the Spirit; and in Acts 4 people are filled with the Spirit. *But in each of those cases an accompanying phenomenon of tongues is NOT mentioned. Therefore, you can’t equate the baptism of the Spirit, the receiving of the Spirit, or the filling of the Spirit with speaking in tongues.*” (ibid, p. 127). Note carefully also, 1 Corinthians 12:13 cf. 30. “Paul wrote ‘By one Spirit were we all baptized.’ How many were baptized? All. Look at verse 30: ‘Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?’ No. In other words, all are baptized, but all do not speak in tongues. You cannot equate those two.” (Ibid, p. 126)*

- 3) **Speaking in tongues is the least important and least desirable spiritual gift. I Cor. 12:29-30; 14:19**. That is an amazing biblical fact, in light of the enormous overemphasis on the gift of tongues!

- 4) **Technically speaking, Jews should (?) be present in any service where tongues are used**-Since one of the main purposes for the apostles speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost, as confirmed by the apostle Paul, was to be a sign to the Jews. (**I Cor. 14:21-23**) i.e. Tongues were a sign intended for UNBELIEVERS! One writer surmises that prior to A.D. 70: “Someone in the congregation would tell a person with the gift when there was an unbelieving Jew in their midst that spoke a certain foreign language. Then the person with the gift would look around to make sure that someone with the gift of interpretation was also present. In the right place at the right time, the one with the gift of languages would speak that language--a language unknown to him but known to that Jewish unbeliever. The message, then, would reach that Jewish person, the interpreter would interpret it for the edification of the congregation, and it would be used in its proper manner.” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 152)
- 5) **Believers should desire the greater gifts- which eliminates tongues from contention**, since it’s the least of the gifts. **I Cor.12:31 cf. vv.28-30** (Note: Since individual believers get no choice in what spiritual gift they get (see #1 above), *this passage is probably referring to the corporate body of the church, and that they should desire and pray for God to give them [their church] the best gifts i.e. good preachers!*)
- 6) Assuming, for the sake of argument, that tongues are still in operation today (?), **a maximum of 3 are to speak in tongues in any one service. I Cor. 14:27.** *If you have ever been in a service where more than 3 spoke in tongues, you can be certain that was not of God!*
- 7) **Tongues speakers are not to interrupt each other or speak at the same time.** (“each in turn”). **I Cor. 14:27.** *If you have ever been in a service where more than one was speaking in “tongues” at the same time, that was not of God!*
- 8) **If there is no interpreter, speaking in tongues is not to take place. I Cor. 14:27-28.** *If you’ve ever been in a service where people spoke in tongues, but no one interpreted it, that was not of God!*
- 9) **There should be only one interpreter. I Cor. 14:27d.** “Here is something most people miss. The Greek text emphasizes the word translated ‘one’ (*heis*) in this verse by putting it in the emphatic form. The verse is saying, ‘Let one interpret--not two, five, seven, or fourteen--just one.’ Why” Because the problem in the Corinthian church was that everyone wanted to gain the preeminence by giving the interpretation.” (MacArthur., S/T, p. 153). *If you’ve ever been in a service with more than one interpreter, that was not of God!*
- 10) **Church leaders are to sit in judgment on whether preaching (prophesying) &/or the interpretations of tongues speaking given, are correct or not. I Cor. 14: 29** “...many times when the so-called interpretation is given, it can be proved that it is not a true interpretation at all. There are many testimonies to the effect that people have experimented by speaking Hebrew or other known foreign languages, and the interpretation given had nothing to do with what was actually said!” (Ibid, p. 105).
- 11) **The service should be decent and in order, without chaotic behavior. I Cor. 14: 32-33, 40.** “Any confusion or disorder in the assembly was an indication of something that did not originate from God (verse 33).” (Paul Van Gorder, *Charismatic Confusion*, Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1972, p. 33, cited in MacArthur, CC, pp. 224-225). “In Corinth, the counterfeit practices of heathenism had engulfed the church... Those kind of ecstatic, sensual, feeling-oriented experiences, however, are never associated in the New Testament with the true work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 14:32 Paul says, ‘The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.’ In other words, no one is ever to give up his spirit or lose control of himself.” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 82)
- 12) **Women are not to speak in tongues or prophecy (preach) at all! I Cor. 14: 34-35 cf. I Tim. 2:11-15, esp. vv. 11-12.** This is interesting, since the majority of most tongues speaking, in most charismatic churches is often done by women! *Any time a woman has spoken in tongues in a service, you can know that was not of God!*³

³Female tongues advocates try to get around this biblical command by saying that Paul was simply referring to women chattering or talking during church services. But the entire context is dealing with tongues and prophecy (preaching)! In addition, if Paul forbids women from even talking in services, do you think he would allow them to preach or speak in tongues during a service? The Scripture is very clear on the question of women preaching in church services: They are forbidden to do so cf. I Tim. 2:11-15. It should also be pointed out here that the reasons women are forbidden to preach or lead a church are NOT due to Paul’s chauvinistic cultural hangups! On the contrary, there were two reasons (the order of creation, and the occurrences at the Fall), both of which are *theological*, NOT cultural! A thorough study of

In relation to the above list, Van Gorder observes: “*Most contemporary charismatics violate every one of the apostle’s guidelines*” (Ibid, p. 225). MacArthur adds: “*These principles do a good job of regulating tongues. In fact, if the true gift of tongues hadn’t ceased in the first century, these regulations might end 95 percent of what goes on in the tongues movement today.*” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 154).

So...even assuming the gift of tongues is still in operation and being given to believers today (an assumption I do NOT agree with but am allowing here for the sake of argument!)... **ANY TIME ANY OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN VIOLATED, YOU CAN KNOW THAT THAT TONGUES SPEAKING WAS NOT OF GOD**, AND WAS NOT THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT...*BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT AUTHORED THE WORD OF GOD (INCLUDING THESE REGULATIONS), AND HE WOULD NOT CONTRADICT HIMSELF & GO AGAINST HIS OWN WORD!*

IT’S APPARENT THAT ONLY THE APOSTLES & FOUNDATIONAL LEADERS POSSESSED MIRACULOUS “SIGN” GIFTS. -II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4; Acts 14:3 cf. 6-18; Rom. 15:19. **REASON:** Those miraculous sign gifts authenticated the foundational prophets and apostles & their message. There were false teachers and bogus apostles who traveled around too! How would people who had never met someone like the Paul, know that he was truly God’s servant and his word to be trusted and believed as the Word of God? Paul would do miraculous signs to validate his claims and establish instant credentials. *If those signs would have continued unabated throughout history, or if all believers possessed them, there would have been no way of knowing or validating who the true apostles and prophets were!* BUT EVERYONE DID NOT RECEIVE OR MANIFEST THEM!

HAS THE BIBLICAL GIFT OF TONGUES CEASED? I believe it has!
What evidence is there to support that viewpoint?

The Testimony of Scripture -I Cor. 13. This passage has been interpreted in various ways, particularly in reference to the mysterious phrase “*when that which ‘is perfect’ (?) is come...*” -13:10

What is, “the perfect”? It seems to me, that the most natural interpretation is that “the perfect” refers to the eternal state, i.e. after the millennium, when the new heavens and new earth are revealed, as opposed to “the perfect” being the completion of the New Testament canon, the coming of the Holy Spirit, or even the coming of Christ at the end of the tribulation. “Many suggestions have been made as to the meaning of ‘the perfect.’ Some believe it is the complete New Testament; thus they conclude this passage is saying that tongues would cease when the canon was closed. Various others say the perfect thing is the maturing of the church, the rapture, or the second coming. But it seems that the perfect thing Paul has in mind must be the eternal state--’face to face’ in verse 12 can best be explained as being with God in the new heavens and new earth. It is only in glory that we will know as we are known (v. 12).” (Ibid, pp. 230-231)

I Cor. 13:8 teaches that tongues will cease. The only question is when. “Tongues...’will cease.’ The Greek verb used in 1 Corinthians 13:8 (*pauro*) means ‘to cease permanently.’ It implies that when tongues ceased, they would never start up again... The passage does not say *when* tongues were to cease. Some commentators believe verse 10 sets the timing: ‘When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away;’... The language of the passage puts tongues in a category apart from prophecy and knowledge. Verse 8 says prophecy and knowledge will be ‘done away’ (Gk., *katargeo*), but tongues ‘will cease’ (*pauro*, ‘stop’). *Katargeo* appears as a passive verb, meaning that the subject of the sentence receives the action: Prophecy and knowledge will be ‘done away’ by ‘the perfect.’ *Pauro*, however, appears in the Greek middle voice, which here seems to signify a reflexive action: The gift of tongues will ‘stop itself.’ *When* is not stipulated, but they won’t be around when the perfect thing arrives. History suggests that tongues ceased shortly after Paul wrote this epistle, as we shall see...” (MacArthur, Ibid)

“Incidentally, knowledge and prophecy need not be understood in this context exclusively as miraculous or revelatory gifts. The non-revelatory gifts of knowledge (the ability to grasp the meaning of God’s revelation) and prophecy (the ability to proclaim truth powerfully) continue today and will not pass away until the ultimate perfection of the eternal state causes them to be ‘done away.’” (Ibid). “The Greek word for prophecy comes from the two Greek words *pro* (meaning ‘before’) and *phemi* (meaning ‘to speak’). *It literally means ‘to speak before.’* Its primary use is to speak before an audience (forth-telling), not ‘to speak before’ in terms of time (foretelling). The

the subject will also demonstrate that appeals to the rare mention of “prophetesses” in Scripture (only 7 instances in the entire Bible) also lends no support. Virtually all of the women in those passages were involved in such an activity one time only, *and one of their “prophesyings” consisted of nothing more than give birth to a child with a prophetic name!* (See John MacArthur, Jr., “*God’s High Calling For Women*” (I Tim. 2:11-15), for a fuller treatment and explanation of the topic of prophetesses in Scripture, and a refutation of the standard charismatic viewpoint on them. For a refutation of women in the ministry, see the appendix of my privately published booklet “*The Various Groups in Protestant Christianity Today*”, Goroka, Papua New Guinea, Nov. 2003.

gift of prophecy, then, was to speak before people, proclaiming the Word of God. The purpose of this gift is indicated in 1 Corinthians 14:3... You may say, 'I thought to prophesy meant to predict the future.' No. The idea of predicting the future never came along until the middle Ages, when the English word took on that meaning. That isn't its meaning in the Greek language. *Propheteuo* simply means 'to speak before others.'"(?) (MacArthur, S/T, pp. 15, 85). *Getting back to our point here though, the context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 would appear to teach that the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues would stop before the other two gifts (knowledge & prophecy) would.*

13:9-13 seems to support the above idea that tongues would cease by itself BEFORE the other two gifts.

Please note that *after verse eight, tongues is not mentioned or alluded to again*, while knowledge and prophecy are repeatedly referred to in the ensuing context (esp. vv. 9, 12). "The verb *katargeo*, in describing the cessation of prophecy and knowledge, is in the passive voice... In the case of prophecy and knowledge, something will act upon them to cause them to stop. What is it that's going to do that? Look at verses 9-10: 'For we know in part [the gift of knowledge], and we prophesy in part [the gift of prophecy]. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away [Gk., *katargeo*]. What is it that's going to come and stop prophecy and knowledge? 'That which is perfect.' Also notice that tongues do not appear in verse 9. Why? Because only prophecy and knowledge are stopped by 'that which is perfect.' The verb that says tongues will cease (*pauo*) is in the middle voice...the Greek middle voice is reflexive, indicating that the subject is acting upon itself... **Literally, then, verse 8 says, 'Tongues will stop by themselves.'** That's the meaning that the middle voice gives to the verb *pauo*... The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the middle form of *pauo* fifteen times to translate the Hebrew word that means 'to complete,' 'to stop,' 'to finish,' 'to accomplish,' 'to end.' It has a finality to it. And the reflexive middle voice gives it the idea that it ends all by itself. The inevitable deduction: The gifts of prophecy and knowledge, then, are going to continue on until 'that which is perfect' comes and stops them. The gift of tongues is going to stop all by itself. That's what has to be deduced when one looks at the Greek text." (MacArthur, S/T, pp. 18-19).

"Tongues was a miraculous, revelatory gift, and as we have noted repeatedly, the age of miracles and revelation ended with the apostles. The last recorded miracles in the New Testament occurred around A.D. 58, with the healings on the island of Malta (Acts 28:7-10). From A.D. 58 to 96, when John finished the book of Revelation, no miracle is recorded. Miracle gifts like tongues and healing are mentioned only in 1 Corinthians, an early epistle. **Two later epistles, Ephesians and Romans, both discuss gifts of the Spirit at length--but no mention is made of the miraculous gifts. *By that time miracles were already looked on as something in the past (Heb. 2:3-4).***" (ibid, p. 231)

"...as we noted, tongues were intended as a sign to unbelieving Israel. They signified that God had begun a new work that encompassed the Gentiles. The Lord would now speak to all nations in all languages. The barriers were down. And so the gift of languages symbolized not only the curse of God on a disobedient nation, but also the blessing of God on the whole world. Tongues were therefore a sign of transition between the Old and New Covenants." (ibid, p. 232)

"Moreover, the gift of tongues (as noted above) was inferior to other gifts. It was given primarily as a sign (I Cor. 14:22) and cannot edify the church in a proper way. It is also easily misused to 'edify' self (14:4). The church meets for the edification of the body, not self-gratification or personal experience-seeking. Therefore, tongues had limited usefulness in the church, and so it was never intended to be a permanent gift." (ibid)

"Another characteristic of the gift of tongues was that when a person spoke in tongues and had it interpreted, that was a direct revelation from God. Has direct revelation from God ceased? Yes! Jude 3: ('contend for the faith **once for all** delivered unto the saints.' -NASV). Is there any more to Scripture than we now have? No. In fact, at the end of the last book of the Bible, the apostle John wrote...Rev. 22:18... Tongues as a revelation source ceased to have the meaning they had in the infancy of the church--when God was giving revelations before the Bible was complete." (MacArthur, S/T, p. 24)

The Testimony of Church History. Since the Bible teaches that tongues would cease by themselves and that once they stopped, they would not return again, We must now ask the question: ***"Was there ever a time when tongues ceased to operate in the Church?"*** ANSWER: YES!

(cont.)

By the end of the first century tongues had ceased! I Cor. 13:8 had said that they would cease, and there is no hint or intimation anywhere in Scripture that biblical tongues would ever start up again!⁴ “History records that tongues did cease.⁵ **Paul wrote at least twelve epistles after 1 Corinthians and never mentioned tongues again. Peter never mentioned tongues; James never mentioned tongues; John never mentioned tongues; neither did Jude.** Tongues appeared only briefly in Acts and 1 Corinthians as the new message of the gospel was being spread. But once the church was established, tongues were gone. They stopped. The later books of the New Testament do not mention tongues again. Nor did anyone in the post-apostolic age. Cleon Rogers wrote, ‘It is significant that the gift of tongues is nowhere alluded to, hinted at or even found in the Apostolic Fathers.’...**Chrysostom and Augustine--the greatest theologians of the eastern and western churches--considered tongues obsolete.** Chrysostom stated categorically that tongues had ceased by his time. Writing in the fourth century, he described tongues as an obscure practice... ‘*The obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur but now no longer take place,*’ he wrote. Augustine wrote of tongues ... ‘*These were signs adapted to the time...That thing was done for a betokening, and it passed away.*’...**Augustine** also wrote, ‘*Why is it that no man speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the Church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations.* Before, the Church was in one nation, where it spoke in the tongues of all. By speaking then in the tongues of all, it signified what was to come to pass; that by growing among the nations, it would speak in the tongues of all.’” (Ibid, pp. 233-234)

After the first century, only odd & heretical groups practiced speaking in tongues until the 20th century! The only groups who practiced tongues from A.D. 100 - 1900, were a few aberrant groups & individuals that existed in various times in church history. “During the first five hundred years of the church, the only people who claimed to have spoken in tongues were followers of **Montanus**, who was branded a heretic...The next time any significant tongues-speaking movement arose within Christianity was in the late seventeenth century. A group of **militant Protestants in Cevennes** region of southern France began to prophesy, experience visions, and speak in tongues... The group...(is) remembered for their political and military activities, not their spiritual legacy... At the other end of the spectrum the **Jansenists, a group of Roman Catholic loyalists** who opposed the Reformers’ teaching on justification by faith, also claimed to be able to speak in tongues in the 1700s... Another group that practiced a form of tongues was **the Shakers...Mother Ann Lee**, founder of the sect, regarded herself as the female equivalent of Jesus Christ... The Shakers believed sexual intercourse was sinful, even within marriage... Then in the early nineteenth century, **Scottish Presbyterian pastor Edward Irving** and members of his congregation practiced speaking in tongues and prophesying. Irvingite prophets often contradicted each other, their prophecies failed to come to pass, and their meetings were characterized by wild excesses...**This group eventually became the Catholic Apostolic Church**, which taught many false doctrines, embracing several Roman Catholic doctrines and creating twelve apostolic offices...

“Thus we conclude that from the end of the apostolic era to the beginning of the twentieth century there were no genuine occurrences of the New Testament gift of tongues. They had ceased, as the Holy Spirit had said they would (1 Cor. 13:8)... New Testament scholar Thomas R. Edgar makes this observation: ‘**Since these gifts and signs did cease, the burden of proof is entirely on the charismatics to prove their validity...However, non-charismatics have no burden to prove this, since it has already been proved by history. It is an irrefutable fact admitted by many Pentecostals. Therefore the charismatics must prove biblically that the sign gifts will start up again during the Church Age and that today’s phenomena are this reoccurrence.**’” (Ibid, pp. 234-235) It will not do to say, “Yes, it did cease, but this is the ‘latter rain’ prophesied by Joel.” We have already noted (see III above) that that passage has nothing to do with any second Pentecost, restoration of 1st century gifts, etc., but rather refers to “the day of the Lord,” a time yet future! It is an irrefutable fact that tongues ceased long ago, and the Bible says that when they did, they would never reappear again. “**Furthermore, Joel 2:28-29 doesn’t say anything about anyone speaking in tongues.** (!) It does talk about prophecy, dreams, and visions--but it does not talk about tongues.” (MacArthur, S/T, p. 43).

⁴Charismatics try to use Joel 2 as biblical support for a restoration, or “second Pentecost,” but we have seen earlier in the notes, that a careful examination of that passage offers NO support for such an idea. “The context of Joel 2 is the great millennial kingdom, when the Jews are in their land, when the crops begin to grow, when the desert blossoms like a rose, when it rains in the first month as it would rain in a whole year of rain, when everything grows without the threat of pestilence or plague, and when everybody worships and praises God. That has never happened in the history of Israel; it’s referring to the kingdom.” (MacArthur, *Speaking in Tongues*, p. 41)

⁵“*The Modern Tongues Movement*, by Robert G. Gromacki, *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, by Victor Budgen, & *Miraculous Gifts: Are They for Today?*, by Thomas R. Edgar, are three excellent books that document this fact.” (MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, p. 232)