

Spiritual Gifts

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Introduction

Spiritual gifts are gifts given by the Holy Spirit to Christians in the context of the Church as the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:4-7, 27-28). In I Corinthians 12:11, the apostle Paul says that *the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills*. This tells us that spiritual gifts come from God the Holy Spirit (cf. vv. 4, 7). In I Corinthians 12:7 the apostle Paul writes *that the manifestation [gift] of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all*. Peter also wrote that *each one has received a gift* (I Peter 4:10). Therefore, every member of the Church has at least one spiritual gift. This association of spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit in connection with the Church implies that spiritual gifts are given with the gift of the Holy Spirit upon entrance into the Church, which is usually at a person's water baptism (Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27-28).

There are two principal reasons why the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to the Church through its members. First, their close association with the Holy Spirit suggests they are given to empower the members to witness for Jesus more effectively, for that is one major purpose for the Holy Spirit according to Acts 1:8: *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*. Second, after listing four spiritual gifts, Ephesians 4:11-12 tells us that they are (a) to equip the members for the work of ministry and (b) to edify (build up) the Church. It is important to note here that the Bible never says that spiritual gifts are given for the benefit of the individual believer who has them. They are to be used unselfishly.

They are called spiritual gifts for two reasons. First, they are given by the Holy Spirit. Second, they are given in order for the members to engage in a particular spiritual ministry or work.

Identity of the Spiritual Gifts

There are four different lists of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament, with some of them repeated in more than one list. First, Romans 12:3-8 lists prophecy, ministry (service), teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy. Second, I Corinthians 12:4-11 lists wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. Third, I Corinthians 12:28-30 lists apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, healing, helps, administration, and tongues. Finally, Ephesians 4:7-8, 11 lists apostles, prophets, evangelists, and

pastor-teachers. Note: In Ephesians 4:11, the Greek text does not have the word for *some* preceding the word teacher. This means that it is connected with pastors in a hyphenated single gift of pastor-teachers.

When you eliminate the duplicates in the four lists, there are a total of twenty different spiritual gifts as follows:

- *Prophecy*—Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:

Some have understood this gift to simply be the gift of preaching as one who speaks for God unofficially, not as an inspired prophet. However, given that it is also among the spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4, which includes apostles, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (all of whom preach), this must be the special prophetic gift that inspired prophets possess.

- *Ministry (service)*—Romans 12:

Every Church member has some kind of ministry, so this must represent the kind of ministry or service that is extraordinary, one for whom service comes easily and naturally.

- *Teaching*—Romans 12; I Corinthians 12:

The gift of teaching enables a member to be able to teach others in a way that makes the content clear and easy to understand.

- *Pastor-Teachers*—Ephesians 4:

This tells us that a church pastor should also be a teacher of God's Word.

- *Exhortation*—Romans 12:

To exhort others means to encourage them. So this gift is given to enable a member to be able to bring extraordinary encouragement to others.

- *Giving*—Romans 12:

All members are to give of themselves and their finances. So this is a gift that enables the receiver of it to be able to give more of themselves and/or their finances than most can.

- *Leadership*—Romans 12:

This spiritual gift enables the receiver to lead people in a way that naturally does not alienate them but is able to get the best out of people for the cause of God.

- *Mercy*—Romans 12:

All are to show mercy to others, but this gift enables some members to show extraordinary mercy to others.

- *Wisdom*—I Corinthians 12:

All have some level of wisdom, which is the ability to use knowledge in a prudent manner. So this gift must enable the receiver of it to have more wisdom than most people have.

- *Knowledge*—I Corinthians 12:

All have some level of spiritual knowledge, of course, so that this gift enables a member to understand more spiritual knowledge than most.

- *Faith*—I Corinthians 12:

All have some level of faith because that is required to accept the gift of Jesus' righteousness. So this gift gives the receiver greater faith than most people have.

- *Healings*—I Corinthians 12:

This gift enables the receiver to promote physical and/or emotional healing in others. It does not necessarily imply the gift of healing others in a miraculous manner.

- *Miracles*—I Corinthians 12:

The gift of miracles is the supernatural ability to perform tasks that cannot be done in a natural way.

- *Discerning of spirits*—I Corinthians 12:

This is the extraordinary ability to discern truth faster than most people can discern it, which especially implies the ability to distinguish truth from error.

- *Tongues*—I Corinthians 12:

In Acts 2 all acknowledge that tongues is the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language that was not learned in order to proclaim the gospel to foreigners. The debate over tongues in Christianity today concerns the gift as discussed in I Corinthians 14, which we interpret in this chapter.

- *Interpretation of Tongues*—I Corinthians 12:

The supernatural ability to be able to interpret the language spoken by another member who speaks in tongues.

- *Apostles*—I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:

Since the apostles of Jesus had to be personally called by Jesus, taught by Him, and have seen the resurrected Jesus, this must refer to an apostle of the Church—that is, one who is officially *sent out* (meaning of *apostle*) by the Church as a missionary, which usually means being sent to a foreign land.

- *Helps*—I Corinthians 12:

The Greek word for *helps* means to lay hold of and is frequently used with the meaning of someone who provides *assistance* to the sick and poor. Therefore, it probably refers to the gift of being a deacon or deaconess.

- *Administration*—I Corinthians 12:

This is the gift or organization of one who is a capable administrator in the Church.

- *Evangelists*—Ephesians 4:

This is the gift of a member who proclaims the gospel, which is the meaning of the Greek word. Of course, all members are in some way to proclaim the gospel. Thus, this must refer to one who engages fulltime in proclaiming the gospel in distinction from pastor-teachers, evangelists, and apostles (missionaries). Therefore, this refers to fulltime gospel workers who usually proclaim the gospel in their own country.

Identifying a Person's Spiritual Gift(s)

It is self-evident that if the Holy Spirit gives a church member one or more gifts, that member should have some way to identify his or her gift or gifts. How can they be identified? First, the same Holy Spirit who gave a member one or more spiritual gifts gives that person strong

impressions about which gift or gifts He has given him or her. Second, even without strong impressions, by volunteering to work in several different ministries (though probably not all at once), the member and other members also will provide feedback as to whether that member has a particular gift or not. Finally, one may take a spiritual gifts test, which is simply a self-test that asks a series of questions designed to help the person decide what comes naturally to him or her. Such tests can either be obtained from the local church pastor or even on the Internet, although some tests are more thorough than others. Remember that tests are not as good as real experience. So one should not lock oneself into or out of a particular ministry simply on the basis of a spiritual gifts test.

Spiritual gifts may also be developed and improved by their use just as muscles are developed by exercising them. Some spiritual gifts might also be natural talents a person was born with, but which the Holy Spirit later sanctified as a spiritual gift. Nevertheless, spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit, and a person cannot create them by his own willpower out of nothing.

The So-Called Sign Gifts

The so-called sign gifts are the spiritual gifts of prophecy, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and possibly of healing. They are called sign gifts because the large majority of Christians believe that they were only given to the early Church as signs to validate the new Christian movement as a movement from God. Thus, it is believed they were designed by God from the beginning to be only temporary and to end with the end of the New Testament Era at about the close of the first century.

From a human, historical perspective, two factors were associated with the end of the so-called sign gifts. First, by the early second century, a large number of members claiming to possess the prophetic gift were proclaiming rather spectacular prophecies. Second, in that same time frame, the Church was adjusting its governance structure to accommodate a growing Church community. In doing so, the Church developed the three-fold ministry of the (1) episcopate (one bishop as head of a regional group of local churches); (2) presbyterate (presbyters or elders who eventually became known as priests); and (3) diaconate (several deacons per local church). Even in the second century an emphasis was being placed on members being obedient to their bishop. This eventually developed before the middle of the third century into the concept of apostolic succession, that each generation of bishops possessed apostolic authority by virtue of their ordination. This three-fold ministry was used to deny the existence of the genuine prophetic gift in the Church, thus eventually ending the trouble being caused by many who claimed the prophetic gift.

This organizational development, coupled with the problems in the Church created by those claiming to possess the spiritual gift of prophecy, led to the widespread concept that the more

spectacular gifts were designed to be temporary as signs validating the Christian movement as from God. This view, held today by the large majority of believers and their churches, is known as the cessation view—that is, that the sign gifts have ceased to exist because of the divine plan. However, in his introduction to I Corinthians, the letter in which Paul deals the most with spiritual gifts, he wrote of his desire that believers should come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 1:7). And in Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul refers to apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers as continuing in the Church *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. Since prophets is one of those mentioned there, and it is one of the so-called sign gifts, it appears to be evidence that Paul expected the sign gifts to continue in the Church until the Second Coming of Jesus. Therefore, the cessation view of these gifts apparently is not the whole Biblical view.

So why have these more spectacular spiritual gifts appear to have been absent during most of Christian history? Part of the answer is probably that the Church no longer expected or accepted them when they did seem to appear. Why would the Holy Spirit give gifts to the Church that did not expect them and would not therefore accept them? Members with such gifts would either be ignored or their “sign gifts” would have been attributed to Satan.

However, the cessationists have a point as well. From Bible history, we discover there were three great waves of the miraculous among God’s people. The first one was in connection with Moses and the exodus of Israel from Egypt. The second was in connection with the prophets Elijah and Elisha amid the great apostasy in Israel. The third wave was in connection with Jesus and His apostles in the first century A.D. Although no spiritual gift will be withheld if the Holy Spirit deems it necessary, Bible history does suggest that the “sign gifts” come in waves in connection with extremely important times.

Final Wave of “Sign Gifts”

This pattern of “sign gifts” occurring only at very important periods of the history of God’s people suggest that a final wave of such spiritual gifts will come very near the Second Coming of Jesus. Joel 2:28-29, 31 declares that it shall come to pass afterward *That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days...Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord*. The prophet Joel seems to confirm our expectation of a final wave of “sign gifts” just before the return of Jesus in glory. Such an outpouring of the Holy Spirit will validate God’s final warning message to the world to get ready for Jesus to come.

Of course, where there is the genuine there is usually Satan's counterfeit. Therefore, we should expect to see a counterfeit wave of "sign gifts" about the same time, and probably before the genuine wave so as to confuse God's people about which are genuine and which are not. Indeed, Jesus warned of *false christs and false prophets [who] will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive* (Matthew 24:24). The Antichrist will work with *all power, signs, and lying wonders* (II Thessalonians 2:9). And Revelation 16:14 warns that the *spirits of demons, performing signs, [will] go out to the kings of the earth* at the end-time. Of course, indeed Satan's counterfeit signs will have to come before the majority of the heaven-based signs if they are going to deceive people and thus cause them to ignore the genuine heavenly end-time message.

So how will we know whether "sign gifts" are from God or from Satan? *To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* (Isaiah 8:20). The phrase *the law and the testimony* refers to the Bible, *law* representing the first five books of Moses and *testimony* referring to the testimony of the prophets. Even if a miraculous event is proven to be genuine and not fake, the person's teaching must be rejected if it is not consistent with Scriptural teaching. Therefore, we cannot trust our senses, especially as we draw nearer to Jesus' return. Seeing is not believing; rather, believing the Word of God is seeing the truth!

Notwithstanding that the more miraculous spiritual gifts have been historically given in waves, if the Holy Spirit deems it necessary to give members some of them, the Church should not dismiss them automatically, because Paul did indicate his desire that the Church come behind in no gift (I Corinthians 1:7). In this sense, the cessationists are definitely wrong about the so-called "sign gifts."

The Gift of Tongues

Christian glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, began near the beginning of the twentieth century in the Pentecostal movement. This movement had its roots in Methodism, which arose in England during the eighteenth century as a reform movement within the Anglican Church to restore more piety and personal spiritual growth of sanctification to Christianity. Pentecostalism emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit and His spiritual gifts to the Church, especially the gift of tongues. In this sense, Pentecostalism represented the most significant Christian rejection of the cessation view of the so-called "sign gifts."

The Sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

The Pentecostal movement teaches that the most important sign that a person has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit is his or her ability to speak in tongues. But are any of the spiritual gifts *the sign* of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? In I Corinthians 12 the apostle Paul wrote that the Holy

Spirit distributes spiritual gifts *to each one individually as He wills* (v. 11). Then he added in verse 30, *Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?* Nothing could be plainer that not every believer possesses any one particular gift, including the gift of tongues. Instead, the Bible-based evidence is that one who has received the Holy Spirit will reflect the *fruit* of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). The Bible teaches that all officially receive the Holy Spirit at water baptism (Acts 2:38; cf. John 3:5). Therefore, that is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There is no teaching in the New Testament that a believer receives a separate, second, and more expansive filling of the Holy Spirit. The idea that he does is a holdover from the Methodist and Second Great Awakening (1795-1830) movement of *entire sanctification* that supposedly comes from the second blessing of the Holy Spirit. But it is not a Biblical teaching.

The Linguistics of Glossolalia

Since the 1960s, glossolalia began to spread globally among numerous Christian denominations. Since that time, linguists and others have done extensive research in glossolalia as practiced among Christians and non-Christians alike. This research revealed four basic irrefutable facts. First, glossolalia exists among many non-Christians and even among some non-religious peoples. Second, there is no linguistic or structural difference between Christian and non-Christian, Western and Eastern, or religious and non-religious glossolalia. Third, it is definitely not a human language of any kind, living or dead. Finally, it can be learned, subconsciously or consciously.

What should this linguistic evidence lead Bible-believing Christians to conclude? First, we should ask ourselves if the Holy Spirit would give the same spiritual gift to non-Christians, like shamans and spirit mediums. Certainly not! Second, if glossolalia can be taught and learned, that suggests that it is not a supernatural gift from the Holy Spirit. But the Bible is too clear that all spiritual gifts are initially given by the Holy Spirit, not learned. They can be improved upon by exercising them, but their origin is from the Holy Spirit. Third, Scripture tells us to *Test all things* (I Thessalonians 5:21). Experiments have been conducted in which several Christians were each separately asked to interpret the meaning of a recorded message in *tongues*. No single interpretation came close to being the same. When told that news, they just replied that God had given different messages through the one message. Of course, that means glossolalia cannot be any kind of language—of the Holy Spirit or of angels—if the same “language” message can have multiple meanings. Also, that means there is no way to test it. All of this should lead the honest Christian to conclude that modern glossolalia is just what it sounds like—gibberish.

New Testament Gift of Tongues

Even most modern Christian tongues-speaking people agree that the gift of tongues in Acts 2 and elsewhere (Acts 10; 19; Mark 16:17) was the supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language

that the speakers had not learned. Sometimes it is argued as the gift of hearing or the interpretation of tongues because Acts 2:8 says that the listeners on that Day of Pentecost declared that they heard *each in our [their] own language*. But, first, verse 6 admits that they *heard them speak in his own language*. Second, the gift of the divided tongues of fire fell upon the 120 believers in the upper room, not on the listeners (Acts 2:1-4; cf. 1:12-14). Therefore, it was the gift of tongues, not the gift of the interpretation of tongues.

However, it is the gift of tongues in I Corinthians 12-14 that they believe is different—the language of angels, of the Holy Spirit, or of some prayer language. The key chapter that gives some context to this practice is chapter 14. Understanding what Paul meant in I Corinthians 14 is made difficult by different translations adding words not in the Greek text and in translating the same Greek word in different ways within the chapter. However, in the Greek text Paul's use of the words for *tongue(s)* and *to speak*, when used together *and* separately, is fully consistent with usages elsewhere in the New Testament, which always refer to human language. Also, in harmony with the sound principle of interpreting the more obscure by the clear and plain, we conclude that there is only one spiritual gift of speaking in tongues, and that is the same as throughout Acts and Mark 16:17, the supernatural gift of speaking in a foreign language that the speaker had not learned.

The Meaning of Greek Terms

The word *glossolalia* is derived from two Greek words, *glossa*, meaning *tongue* or *language*, and *laleo*, meaning *to speak*. Thus it literally means *to speak a language*.

Five sections of Scriptures involving seven chapters of three different New Testament books refer to the practice of speaking in tongues: (1) Mark 16:17; (2) Acts 2:4, 11; (3) Acts 10:46; (4) Acts 19:6; (5) I Corinthians 12:30; (6) I Corinthians 13:1; and (7) I Corinthians 14. I Corinthians 12-14 forms the largest section among these passages. Because I Corinthians 14 is the controversial chapter in the conflict over the meaning of glossolalia in the New Testament, we will focus our attention on that chapter after a few comments about the key words found in all of the New Testament passages.

The Greek word *glossa* appears 24 times in the New Testament outside of the passages where it is linked to speaking in tongues. It always has the literal meaning of either the tongue as the organ of speech or a normal human language. In Acts 2:3 it is used figuratively as tongues, as of fire. The point is that the usage of *glossa* never refers to unintelligible or ecstatic speech. Outside of the New Testament, in non-Biblical Greek, not one shred of evidence has been found for interpreting *glossa*, *lalein*, or *glossa lalein* as ecstatic speech. The same is true in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

Speaking in Tongues in I Corinthians 12-14

Before moving to I Corinthians 14, where the heart of the controversy lies, two important things need to be noted. First, in the introduction to this section on speaking in tongues (chapters 12-14), Paul notes that the purpose for all of the spiritual gifts is for *the profit of all* (I Corinthians 12:7). This simple statement undermines the phenomena of modern glossolalia, which sees tongue-speaking as profitable primarily for the individual doing the speaking. If it does not benefit the entire church community, Paul has little use for it.

Some believers have taught that tongues-speaking in I Corinthians 12-14 is the language of angels on the basis of Paul's statement in 13:1: *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels*. But speaking in tongues is not the language of angels for at least two reasons. First, only the apocryphal *Testament of Job* refers to a language of angels, and it uses the word from which the English word *dialect* is derived rather than the word *glossa* (as used throughout I Corinthians 12-14 as well as Mark 16:17 and the book of Acts). Second, the Greek of I Corinthians 13:1's *Though* means *If* and the verb for *speak* is in the subjunctive mood, meaning that it is a hypothetical statement. Therefore, Paul did not say that he actually spoke the language of angels.

Most scholars believe that the phenomena in I Corinthians 14 represents an abuse of a genuine spiritual gift, while a few believe it is a pagan counterfeit of the spiritual gift. We agree with the majority for the following reasons summarized below:

- The entire discussion in chapters 12-14 concerns the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, of which speaking in tongues is specifically listed (12:10, 28, 30).
- Paul tells the Corinthian believers to *desire spiritual gifts* (14:1) and then refers to speaking in tongues in the very next verse. Again in 14:5 he states, *I wish you all spoke with tongues*.
- Paul himself declares that he speaks in tongues (14:18).
- The apostle clearly tells believers do not forbid to speak with tongues (14:39), but he gave certain regulations governing the use of this gift (14:26-40).

Misleading Translations

Although there is no such thing as a perfect translation of the Bible, or of anything from one language to another, the reader should be aware of misleading translations of I Corinthians 14. Most, but not all, of the misleading translations occur in dynamic translations, where the translator does not attempt a word-for-word translation. Some examples will suffice to warn the reader about drawing conclusions based on the words of one particular translation.

For example, in the King James' Version (KJV), the translators added the word *unknown* in front of the word for *tongue* in verses 2, 4, 14, 19, and 27. The Today's English Version (TEV) added the word *strange* before the word *tongue* or *tongues*. The New English Bible (NEB) uses the words *ecstasy* and *ecstatic* in various parts of the chapter. Finally, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) implies the existence of two different spiritual gifts by translating *glossa* as *language(s)* in Acts 2 and as *tongue(s)* in I Corinthians 14. All of the aforementioned translations imply that the gift of speaking in tongues in I Corinthians involved a mysterious or ecstatic speech that others did not know because it was not a normal human language. In order to understand what Paul was talking about, we must ignore words not in the original text and allow the passage to interpret itself by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Corinthian Tongue-Speaking as Real Human Languages

First, there is the statement in I Corinthians 14:2 that a person speaking in tongues *speaks mysteries*. Paul uses the Greek word for *mystery* more than any other writer of the New Testament. Its usage meaning, in passages like Romans 11:25; 16:25-26, Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-4, and Colossians 1:26, refers to a hidden truth which has now been made known in the New Testament. In other words, the speaking of mysteries is the *revealing* of a once-hidden spiritual truth, especially about Jesus and the gospel. Thus, the speaker who *speaks mysteries* through the gift of tongues is speaking plainly. This forces us to conclude that the reason no one else in the church understood him was that it was in a foreign language that no one in the worship service could speak, not because it was some angelic language or ecstatic gibberish. This is also the reason that Paul says in verse 2 that such a speaker talks only to God rather than men, because only God can understand him. Certainly, he does not speak only to God because he needs to reveal mysteries to God, who already knows all such mysteries.

Second, I Corinthians 14:6 informs us that tongues only profits others if it brings a *revelation...knowledge...prophesying...or...teaching*. This means that it must be spoken so that other people can understand it. Such evidence conflicts with the popular view of glossolalia being a personal prayer language intended only for the speaker and God.

Third, I Corinthians 14:10-11 uses the Greek word *phone* (*language*), from which the English word *phonics* is derived, in a context which clearly describes an ordinary human language, as an illustration of his counsel not to speak in tongues unless others can understand him. Clearly, then, speaking in tongues refers to speaking in a known human language.

Fourth, I Corinthians 14:21 quotes Isaiah 28:11, where it is said that God will use the Assyrians (see context in Isaiah) to speak to His people since they had not listened to their own prophets. Then I Corinthians 14:22 says that *therefore [or likewise] tongues are for a sign*. Obviously, the Assyrians' *tongues* [*glossa*, v. 21] was their own native language, which was a foreign language

to the Hebrew people. By connecting the Assyrians' language with Christian speaking in tongues we know that the latter was also a real, known human language.

Other Objections

While our exposition has addressed most questions about the nature of tongues-speaking in Corinth, two final significant objections to our position need to be addressed.

First, modern glossolalists object by stating that I Corinthians 14:13 means the tongues-speaker does not know what he says when he speaks in tongues: *Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret*. However, verse 4 clearly states that a tongues-speaker edifies himself. According to verse 5, edification requires that the hearers understand what is being said (cf. vv. 12, 26). Therefore, the speaker must know what he is saying. Verse 13, then, must mean that he may not always be able to translate his talk word-for-word, a problem that many speakers of foreign languages have when their mind-set is in a foreign language. In other words, knowing more than one language is one thing. But being able to translate from one language to another is much more difficult.

Second, on the basis of I Corinthians 14:14-16, modern glossolalists assert that tongues-speaking is in the spirit, not the mind, so that the person is not controlling himself, but is speaking a special, non-human language controlled in a trance-like state by the Holy Spirit, as in the case of a prophet in vision (Revelation 1:10, John was *in the Spirit*). This objection is ill-founded for the following reasons:

- We already demonstrated that Paul's regulations in verses 26-40 (especially vv. 27-28) presuppose the tongues-speaker's ability to control the use of his gift. So he is not in any trance-like state.
- There is no Greek word for *in* in verses 14-16, as there is in Revelation 1:10, for example. Neither does the original Greek of verse 2 contain that word, although most English translations have it there.
- The word *therefore* in verse 13 ties it to the previous verses referring to normal human language (vv. 10-12), and the word *for* in verse 14 ties it to verse 13. This indicates that speaking in tongues is a normal human language, which in turn implies that the speaker is in control of himself.

So what does I Corinthians 14:14-16 really mean? First, the expression *my spirit* in verse 14 is equivalent to *with the spirit* in verse 15, and *my understanding [mind]* in verse 14 is equivalent to *with the understanding [mind]* in verse 15. This helps us to see that the *spirit* is the Holy Spirit,

who belongs to the believer (thus, *my spirit*), who gives the message to the one praying. Compare I Corinthians 12:3's *speaking by the Spirit of God* and Romans 8:26's teaching that it is the Holy Spirit who helps believers pray.

Second, verse 14's statement that when speaking in a tongue *my understanding [mind] is unfruitful* means that the message did not bear fruit, because the Greek word for *unfruitful* means *without fruit* or *barren*. In the context, it did not bear fruit because there was no one to *interpret* (v. 13), a word whose basic meaning is to *translate*. Although admittedly, Paul said it in less than a straightforward manner, his message was that when a person speaks in tongues and his mind is unfruitful, it means that his mind bears no fruit precisely because a lack of a translator meant that others could not understand him. It does not, therefore, refer to any supposed trance-like state of the speaker. This view is confirmed by the plain testimony of verse 16: *Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say 'Amen' at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say?* Note that the word *otherwise* specifically ties this verse to the previous ones, as does the phrase *with the spirit*.

Conclusion

There is only one type of tongues-speaking described in the New Testament and that is the supernatural ability to speak a foreign language that the speaker had not learned. This is true, not only in Mark 16:17 and in the book of Acts, but also in I Corinthians 12-14. It was given in order to spread the gospel faster to foreign language groups. It was not given to all members of the church, nor does the New Testament teach that it should be expected that every member have that, or any particular, spiritual gift. Therefore, speaking in tongues is not *the* sign that one has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That sign is the various degree of the *fruit* of the Spirit that every genuine believer has.

The so-called “sign gifts,” or more spectacular gifts—prophecy, miracles, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and perhaps healing—may be present at any time in the history of the Church. At the same time, these gifts seem to come in waves in Biblical history. Therefore, we should expect, and the Scriptures either state or imply, to see a final wave of them just before the Second Coming of Jesus. Of course, that in turn tells us that we should expect to see a counterfeit wave of “sign gifts” first as Satan’s attempt to deceive people into ignoring the final warning message to the world. The difference will not be in the signs themselves but in the spiritual message of those who exhibit the signs.