



EXCERPT

TONGUES & INTERPRETATION

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1:2–4) have words of encouragement and counsel for those who are suffering trials of various kinds.⁴⁷

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4)

When God chooses not to heal, even though we ask him for it, then it is right that we “give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess. 5:18) and realize that God can use sickness to draw us closer to himself and to increase in us obedience to his will. So the psalmist can say, “*It is good for me that I was afflicted*, that I might learn your statutes” (Ps. 119:71), and, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word” (Ps. 119:67).

Therefore God can bring increased sanctification to us through illness and suffering—just as he can bring sanctification and growth in faith through miraculous healing. But the emphasis of the New Testament, both in Jesus’ ministry and in the ministry of the disciples in Acts, seems to be one that encourages us in most cases eagerly and earnestly to seek God for healing, and then to continue to trust him to bring good out of the situation, whether he grants the physical healing or not. The point is that in everything God should receive glory and our joy and trust in him should increase.

E. TONGUES AND INTERPRETATION

It should be said at the outset that the Greek word *glōssa*, translated “tongue,” is used not only to mean the physical tongue in a person’s mouth but also to mean “language.” In the New Testament passages where speaking in tongues is discussed, the meaning “languages” is certainly in view. It is unfortunate, therefore, that English translations have continued to use the phrase “speaking in tongues,” which is an expression not otherwise used in ordinary English and which gives the impression of a strange experience, something completely foreign to ordinary human life. But if English translations were to use the expression “speaking in languages,” it would not seem nearly as strange and would give the reader a sense much closer to what first century Greek speaking readers

47. Some have attempted to establish a difference between sickness and other kinds of suffering and to say that the passages in Scripture that tell Christians they should expect to suffer have to do with *other* kinds of suffering, such as persecution, but do not include physical sickness.

This argument seems unconvincing to me for two reasons: first, Scripture talks about “trials of *various kinds*” (James 1:2; also 1 Peter 1:6), and the intention of the authors in both cases seems to be to speak of *all* the kinds of trials that we experience in this life, including physical illness and affliction. Did James and Peter *not* want Christians who were ill to apply those passages to their own situations? This is hardly likely. (These are both general epistles written to thousands of Christians.)

Second, unless the Lord returns, we will all know the progressive aging and deterioration of our physical bodies, and eventually we will die. Paul says, “Our outer self is wasting away” (2 Cor. 4:16). Almost inevitably this aging process includes various kinds of physical ailments.

It seems best to conclude that the sufferings which God allows us to experience from time to time in this life may at times include physical illness, which God in his sovereign wisdom decides not to heal. There may in fact be many cases when, for various reasons, we do not feel freedom to ask in faith for God to heal. Yet even in these cases the heart of faith will take God’s Word as true and believe that this also has come into our lives “for good” (Rom. 8:28), and that God will bring good to us from it.

would have heard in the phrase when they read it in Acts or 1 Corinthians. However, because current usage of the phrase “speaking in tongues” is so widely established, we will continue to use it in this discussion.⁴⁸

1. Tongues in the History of Redemption

In the Bible, the phenomenon of speaking in tongues is unique to the new covenant age. Before Adam and Eve fell into sin, there was no need to speak in other languages because they spoke the *same language* and were *united in service of God* and in fellowship with him. After the fall people spoke the *same language* but eventually became *united in opposition to God*, and “the wickedness of man was great in the earth” and “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This unified language used in rebellion against God culminated in the building of the tower of Babel at a time when “the whole earth had one language and the same words” (Gen. 11:1). In order to stop this united rebellion against him, God at Babel “confused the language of all the earth” and scattered people abroad over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:9).

In the New Testament, at Pentecost, the disciples in Jerusalem “began to speak in other tongues [or languages] as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). (This verse shows that the miracle was one of speaking, not of hearing. The disciples “began to *speak* in other tongues [or languages].”) Jewish visitors from various nations all heard in their own languages a proclamation of “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). This was a remarkable symbol of the fact that the gospel message was about to go forth to all the nations of the world. Such a symbolic action would have been inappropriate in the Old Testament, for there the evangelistic message was one of inviting people from other nations *to come and join themselves to the Jewish people* and become Jews, and thereby worship God. But here the message is about *to go to each nation* in its own language, encouraging people in every place to turn to Christ and be saved.⁴⁹

Moreover, within the context of the worship service of the church, speaking in tongues plus interpretation gives further indication of a promise that one day the differences in languages that originated at Babel will be overcome. If this gift is operating in a church, no matter what language a word of prayer or praise is given in, once there is an interpretation, everyone can understand it. This is, of course, a two-step process that is “partial,” as are all gifts in this age (1 Cor. 13:10), but it is still an improvement on the situation from Babel to Pentecost when there was no provision to enable people to understand a message in a language they did not know.

Now if we look ahead to the age to come, we see that once again unity of language

48. The most comprehensive and, I think, biblically balanced continuationist book about speaking in tongues is now Sam Storms, *The Language of Heaven: Crucial Questions about Speaking in Tongues* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2019).

49. The speaking in tongues at Pentecost was unusual in

that it was accompanied by “divided tongues as of fire” that “rested on each one of them” (Acts 2:3). Since fire in Scripture is often a symbol of God’s purifying judgment, the presence of fire here may be a symbol of the fact that God was purifying language for use in his service.

will apparently be restored, but this time everyone will once again speak the *same language in service of God*, and in praise to him. “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord” (Zeph. 3:9; cf. 1 Cor. 13:8: “As for tongues, they will cease”).

Finally, prayer in tongues in a private setting is another form of prayer to God. Paul says, “If I pray in a tongue, *my spirit prays* but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14). In the overall context of the history of redemption, this also may be seen as one more partial solution to the results of the fall, whereby we were cut off from fellowship with God. Of course, this does not mean that people’s spirits can *only* have fellowship with God when they speak in tongues—for Paul affirms that he prays and sings both in tongues and in his own language (1 Cor. 14:15). However, Paul does see prayer in tongues as an additional means of fellowship directly with God in prayer and worship. Once again, this aspect of the gift of speaking in tongues was not operative, so far as we know, before the new covenant age.

2. What Is Speaking in Tongues?

We may define this gift as follows: *speaking in tongues is prayer or praise spoken in syllables not understood by the speaker.*

a. Words of Prayer or Praise Spoken to God. This definition indicates that speaking in tongues is primarily speech directed toward God (that is, prayer or praise). It is unlike the gift of prophecy, which frequently consists of messages directed *from* God toward people in the church. Paul says, “One who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but *to God*” (1 Cor. 14:2), and if there is no interpreter present at the church service, Paul says that someone who has a gift of speaking in tongues should “keep silent in church and speak to himself and *to God*” (1 Cor. 14:28).

What kind of speech is this that is directed toward God? Paul says, “If I *pray* in a tongue, *my spirit prays* but my mind is unfruitful” (1 Cor. 14:14; cf. vv. 14–17, where Paul categorizes speech in tongues as praying and giving thanks, and v. 28). Therefore speaking in tongues apparently is prayer or praise directed to God, and it comes from the “spirit” of the person who is speaking. This is not inconsistent with the narrative in Acts 2 because the crowd said, “We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11), a description that certainly could mean that the disciples were all glorifying God and proclaiming his mighty works in worship, and the crowd began to listen to this as it occurred in various languages.⁵⁰

I do not want to rule out the possibility that speaking in tongues could sometimes include speech directed to people, not to God, because it is just possible that Paul’s

50. In Acts 10:46 the people at Cornelius’ household began “speaking in tongues and extolling God.” Again, this either means that the speech consisted of praise to God or was

very closely connected with it—grammatically one cannot tell from the text itself.

statement in 1 Corinthians 14:2 is not intended to cover every instance. In any case, the main point of the verse is that only God can *understand* uninterpreted tongues, not that God is the only one to whom speech in tongues can be addressed. In fact, speech to other people might be what is happening in Acts 2. Nevertheless, the evidence that we do have in 1 Corinthians 14 indicates speech directed toward God, and it seems safe to say that that is generally what speaking in tongues will be.

b. Not Understood by the Speaker. Paul says that "one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; *for no one understands him*, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:2). Similarly, he says that if there is speaking in tongues without interpretation no meaning will be communicated: "I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me" (1 Cor. 14:11). Moreover, the entire paragraph of 1 Corinthians 14:13–19 assumes that speech in tongues in the congregation, when it is not accompanied by interpretation, is *not understood* by those who hear:

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up; I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind *in order to instruct others*, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

c. Sometimes Known Languages, Sometimes Not. At Pentecost, speech in tongues was in *known languages* that were understood by those who heard: "each one was hearing them speak *in his own language*" (Acts 2:6). But once again the speech was not understood by the speakers, for what caused the amazement was that Galileans were speaking all these different languages (v. 7). It seems, therefore, that *at times* speaking in tongues may involve speech in actual human languages, sometimes even languages that are understood by some of those who hear. But at other times—and Paul assumes that this will ordinarily be the case—the speech will be in a language that "no one understands" (1 Cor. 14:2).

Some have objected that speaking in tongues must always consist of speech in *known* human languages, since that is what happened at Pentecost. But the fact that speaking in tongues occurred in known human languages *once* in Scripture does not require that it *always* happen with known languages, especially when another description of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14) indicates exactly the opposite.

Paul does not say that foreign visitors to Corinth will understand the speaker, but he says that when someone speaks in tongues "*no one*" will understand and the outsider will

not know what the person is saying (1 Cor. 14:2, 16).⁵¹ In fact, Paul explicitly says that quite the opposite of the phenomenon at Pentecost will happen in the ordinary conduct of church life: if “all speak in tongues” and “outsiders or unbelievers enter,” far from understanding the message, they will say “that you are out of your minds” (1 Cor. 14:23).

Moreover, we must realize that 1 Corinthians 14 is Paul’s general instruction based on a wide experience of tongues-speaking in many different churches, whereas Acts 2 simply describes one unique event at a significant turning point in the history of redemption (Acts 2 is historical narrative while 1 Cor. 14 is doctrinal instruction). Therefore, it would seem appropriate to take 1 Corinthians 14 as the passage that most closely describes the ordinary experience of New Testament churches and to take Paul’s instructions there as the standard by which God intends churches to regulate the use of this gift. In addition, at Pentecost this speaking in tongues had another characteristic that was not shared by any later speech in tongues: there were tongues of fire appearing over the heads of those who spoke (Acts 2:3). But this is not a paradigm for all later experiences of speaking in tongues, not even for those found later in Acts.

Are tongues known human languages then? Sometimes this gift may result in speaking in a known human language that the speaker has not learned, but more often it seems that it will involve speech in a language that no one understands, whether that be a human language or not.⁵²

d. Prayer with the Spirit, Not with the Mind. Paul says, “If I pray in a tongue, *my spirit prays* but my *mind is unfruitful*. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also” (1 Cor. 14:14–15). Paul is not talking about the Holy Spirit praying through us. The contrast between “my spirit” and “my mind” in verse 14 indicates that it is Paul’s human spirit that he is talking about, the nonmaterial aspect of his being. As he uses this gift, his spirit speaks directly to God, even though his mind does not have to formulate

⁵¹ Robertson and Plummer note that 1 Cor. 14:18, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you,” is “strong evidence that Tongues are not foreign languages” (A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914], 314). If they were known foreign languages that foreigners could understand, as at Pentecost, why would Paul speak more than all the Corinthians in private, where no one would understand, rather than in church where foreign visitors could understand?

⁵² Paul does say, “If I speak in the tongues of men *and of angels*” (1 Cor. 13:1), suggesting that he sees the possibility that speaking in tongues may include more than merely human speech. Whether he thinks this is only a hypothetical possibility, or a real one is difficult to say, but we certainly cannot rule out the idea that angelic languages would be involved with this speech as well.

Some have objected that since *glōssa* elsewhere in Greek (outside the New Testament) refers to *known* human languages,

it must refer to known languages in the New Testament as well. But this objection is not convincing, since there was no other word in Greek better suited to refer to this phenomenon, even if it involved talking to God in languages that were not human languages or not fully developed languages of any sort, so long as some content or information was conveyed by the speech.

I am not here arguing that speaking in tongues in Acts 2 was a different phenomenon from the speaking in tongues that Paul discusses in 1 Cor. 14. I am simply saying that the phrase “speaking in tongues” in Acts 2 and 1 Cor. 14 refers to speech in syllables not understood by the speaker but understood by God, to whom this speech is directed. In Acts 2 this happened to be speech in known human languages that had not been learned by the speakers, whereas in 1 Cor. 14 the speech may have been in unknown human languages, or in angelic languages, or in some specialized kind of language given by the Holy Spirit to various speakers individually. The expression is broad enough to include a wide variety of phenomena.

words and sentences and decide what to pray for.⁵³ Paul sees this kind of prayer as an activity that occurs in the spiritual realm, whereby our spirits speak directly to God, but our minds are somehow bypassed and do not understand what we are praying.

We may wonder why God would give the church a gift that operates in the unseen, spiritual realm and that is not understood by our minds. One reason may be to keep us humble, helping prevent intellectual pride. Another reason may be to remind us that God is greater than our understanding and that he works in ways that transcend our understanding. Finally, it is characteristic of much that God does in the new covenant age that it is done in the unseen, spiritual realm: regeneration, genuine prayer, worship “in spirit and in truth,” the spiritual blessings that come through the Lord’s Supper, spiritual warfare, laying up treasures in heaven, setting our minds on things above, where Christ is—all these and many more elements of the Christian life involve activities that occur in the unseen, spiritual realm, activities that we do not see or fully understand. In that light, speaking in tongues is simply another activity that occurs in the unseen spiritual realm, an activity we believe is effective because Scripture tells us it is, not because we can comprehend it with our minds (cf. 1 Cor. 14:5).

e. Not Ecstatic but Self-Controlled. The New English Bible (1970) translated the phrase “speaking in tongues” as “ecstatic speech,” thus giving further support to the idea that those who speak in tongues lose awareness of their surroundings or lose self-control or are forced to speak against their will. Moreover, some of the extreme elements in the Pentecostal movement have allowed frenzied and disorderly conduct at worship services, and this has, in the minds of some, perpetuated the notion that speaking in tongues is a kind of ecstatic⁵⁴ speech.

But this is not the picture given in the New Testament. Even when the Holy Spirit came with overwhelming power at Pentecost, the disciples were able to stop speaking in tongues so that Peter could give his sermon to the assembled crowd. More explicitly, Paul says, “If any speak in a tongue, let there be *only two or at most three, and each in turn*, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God” (1 Cor. 14:27–28). Here Paul requires that those who speak in tongues take turns, and he limits the number to three, indicating clearly that those who spoke in tongues were aware of what was going on around them

53. The phrase “praying in the Holy Spirit” in Jude 20 is not the same expression since it is specifically the “Holy Spirit” who is designated. Jude is simply saying that Christians should pray in conformity to the character and leading of the Holy Spirit, and that may certainly include prayer in tongues, but it would include any other kind of prayer in an understandable language as well. Similarly, “praying at all times *in the Spirit*, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph. 6:18) is specifically a statement that claims to cover all prayer that is made at all times. It refers to prayer in conformity to the character of the Holy Spirit and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but

it should not be restricted to speaking in tongues. Once again, it may include speaking in tongues, but should include all other types of prayer as well. (See the discussion of activities done “in the Holy Spirit” in chapter 30, pp. 795–96.)

54. The word *ecstatic* when used to describe speech activity means either “a state of emotion so intense that one is carried beyond rational thought and self-control” or “the trance, frenzy, or rapture associated with mystic or prophetic exaltation” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th ed. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006], s.v. *ecstatic* [p. 567]).

and were able to control themselves so as to speak only when it was their turn, when no one else was speaking. If there was no one to interpret, they were easily able to keep silent and not speak. All of these factors indicate a high degree of self-control and give no support to the idea that Paul thought of tongues as ecstatic speech of some kind.⁵⁵

f. 1 Corinthians 14:20–25: Tongues and Prophecy as Signs of God's Attitude.

In 1 Corinthians 14:20–25 Paul says that if believers speak in tongues without interpretation in church, they will be acting and thinking like “children” (1 Cor. 14:20). He first quotes a prophecy of judgment from Isaiah 28:11–12: “In the Law it is written, ‘By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord’” (1 Cor. 14:21).

In the context of Isaiah 28, God is warning the rebellious people of Israel that the next words they heard from him would be words of foreigners that they could not understand—the Assyrian army would come on them as agents of God's judgment. Now Paul is about to take this as a general principle—when God speaks to people in language they cannot understand, it is quite evidently a sign of God's judgment.

Paul rightly applies that to the situation of speaking in tongues without interpretation in the church service. He calls it a sign (that is, a sign of judgment) on unbelievers: “Thus *tongues are a sign* not for believers but *for unbelievers*, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?” (1 Cor. 14:22–23). Here Paul uses the word *sign* to mean “sign of God's attitude” (whether positive or negative). Tongues that are not understood by outsiders are certainly a *negative* sign—a sign of judgment. Therefore, Paul cautions the Corinthians not to give such a sign to outsiders who come in. He tells them if an outsider comes in and hears only unintelligible speech, he will certainly not be saved but will conclude that the Corinthians are out of their minds, and the uninterpreted tongues will, in this case, function as a sign of God's judgment.

By contrast, Paul says that prophecy is a sign of God's attitude as well, but here it is a *positive* sign of God's blessing. This is why he can say that prophecy is a sign “for believers” (v. 22). And this is why he concludes his section by saying, “If all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you” (vv. 24–25). When this happens, believers will certainly realize that God is active among them to bring blessing, and prophecy will regularly function as a sign *for believers* of God's positive attitude for them.⁵⁶

⁵⁵. Therefore, it is unfortunate that Thomas Schreiner only lists two alternatives for the nature of speaking in tongues: it is either human languages or else “ecstatic speech” (*Spiritual Gifts*, 123–46), which is, at best, a mildly pejorative label. By contrast, I and all continuationist writers known to me

understand tongues to be *nonecstatic* speech in syllables the speaker does not understand.

⁵⁶. For further discussion of this passage, see Wayne Grudem, “1 Corinthians 14:20–25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God's Attitude,” *WTJ* 41, no. 2 (Spring 1979): 381–96.

g. Tongues without Interpretation. If no one known to have the gift of interpretation is present in the assembly, Paul gives a different guideline: "But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God" (1 Cor. 14:27-28). In other words, speaking in tongues should be in private. No speech in tongues without interpretation should be given in the church service.⁵⁷

Paul speaks of praying in tongues and singing in tongues when he says, "I will *pray with my spirit*, but I will pray with my mind also; I will *sing praise with my spirit*, but I will sing with my mind also" (1 Cor. 14:15). This gives further confirmation to the definition given above in which we viewed tongues as something primarily directed toward God in prayer and praise. It also gives legitimacy to the practice of singing in tongues, whether publicly or privately. Yet the same rules apply for singing as for speaking: if there is no interpreter, it should only be done in private.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, however much Paul warns against using tongues without interpretation *in church*, he certainly views it positively and encourages it in *private*. He says, "The one who speaks in a tongue *builds up himself*, but the one who prophesies builds up the church" (1 Cor. 14:4). What is his conclusion? It is not (as some would argue) that Christians should decide not to use the gift or decide that it has no value when used privately. Rather, he says, "What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also" (v. 15). And he says, "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you" (v. 18), and "Now *I want you all to speak in tongues*, but even more to prophesy" (v. 5), and "Earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues" (v. 39). If our previous understanding of tongues as prayer or praise to God is correct, then we would certainly expect that edification would follow, even though the speaker's mind does not understand what is being said, and his or her spirit is communicating directly with God. Just as prayer and worship in general build us up as we engage in them, so this kind of prayer and worship builds us up too, according to Paul.

h. Tongues with Interpretation: Building Up the Church. Paul says, "The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, *unless someone interprets*,

57. It is troubling that, in some churches today where speaking in tongues is allowed, those who do *not* give a message publicly (perhaps because it is not the appropriate time in the service or perhaps because they do not know if someone will interpret) will still sometimes speak in tongues not "silently" but so that four or five people nearby can hear their speech in tongues. This is simply *disobedience* to Paul's directive, and is not acting in love toward others in the church. Paul says to "keep *silent* in church" if one is not giving a public message in tongues. (Many who have spoken in tongues today say that it can easily be done in an inaudible whisper, so that no one else will hear, and Paul's directions will be obeyed.)

58. Many churches today, however, practice what is sometimes called "singing in the Spirit," in which many or all the congregation will simultaneously sing in tongues, individually improvising their melodies around a certain dominant

musical chord. While many people will testify that there is beauty and spiritual power in such occurrences, once again we must object that it is directly contrary to Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 14:27-28, where those who speak in tongues are to take turns, and there are to be at most three in a worship service, and interpretation is to follow. Though this practice may sound beautiful to those who are familiar with it, and though God may at times graciously use it as a means of winning an unbeliever, Paul explicitly says that the expected result generally will be that unbelievers will say "that you are out of your minds" (1 Cor. 14:23). An alternative to this practice, and one that would both be consistent with Scripture and follow the path of love toward outsiders, would be for everyone to sing in this way, not in tongues, but in an understandable language (whether English or whatever language is commonly understood in the area where the church assembles).

so that the church may be built up" (1 Cor. 14:5). Once a message in tongues is interpreted, all can understand. In that case, Paul says that the message in tongues is *as valuable* to the church as prophecy.

It is important to note here that *Paul does not say that prophecy and tongues have the same function* (for other passages indicate that prophecy is communication from God toward humans, while tongues is generally communication from humans to God). But Paul clearly says they have equal value in edifying the church. We may define the gift of interpretation as *reporting to the church the general meaning of something spoken in tongues*.

i. Not All Speak in Tongues. Just as not all Christians are apostles, not all are prophets or teachers, and not all possess gifts of healing, so also not all speak with tongues. Paul clearly implies this when he asks a series of questions, all of which expect the answer "no," and includes the question "Do all speak with tongues?" (1 Cor. 12:30). The implied answer is no.⁵⁹

Some have argued that Paul here only means that not all speak with tongues *publicly*, and perhaps he would have admitted that all can speak in tongues *privately*. But this distinction seems foreign to the context and unconvincing. He does not specify that not all speak with tongues *publicly* or *in church*, but he simply says that not all speak with tongues. His next question is, "Do all interpret?" (v. 30). His previous two questions were, "Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing?" (vv. 29–30). Would we wish to make the same arguments about these gifts—that not all interpret tongues *publicly*, but that all Christians are able to do it *privately*? Or that not all work miracles publicly, but that all are able to work miracles privately? Such a distinction seems unwarranted by the context in every case.

In actuality, the desire to say that every Christian can speak in tongues (even though Paul says that not all speak in tongues) is probably motivated in most cases by a prior doctrinal understanding that views baptism in the Holy Spirit as an experience subsequent to conversion⁶⁰ and sees speaking in tongues as an initial "sign" of receiving this baptism in the Holy Spirit.⁶¹ But there are serious questions that remain about this doctrinal position (as explained in chapter 39). It seems better to take 1 Corinthians 12:30 to mean just what it says: not all speak in tongues. The gift of tongues—just like every other gift—is not given by the Holy Spirit to every Christian who seeks it. He "apportions to each one individually as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

However, Scripture does not indicate that only a few will receive the gift of speaking in tongues, and since it is a gift Paul views as edifying and useful in prayer and worship (on a personal level even if not in church), it would not be surprising if the Holy Spirit gave a very widespread distribution of this gift, and many Christians in fact received it.⁶²

59. The Greek particle *mē*, which precedes this question, expects the answer "no" from the reader. The NASB captures this sense: "All do not speak with tongues, do they?"

60. See chapter 39 about baptism in the Holy Spirit.

61. This is still the official doctrinal position of the Assemblies of God, for example.

62. Mark 16:17 is sometimes used to claim that all Christians can speak in tongues: "And these signs will accompany

j. What about the Danger of Demonic Counterfeit? At times Christians have been afraid to speak in tongues, wondering if speaking something they do not understand might involve them in speaking blasphemy against God or speaking something that is prompted by a demon rather than by the Holy Spirit.

First, it must be said that this is not Paul's concern, even in the city of Corinth where many had come from pagan temple worship, and where Paul had clearly said that "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God" (1 Cor. 10:20). Nonetheless, Paul says, "I want you all to speak in tongues" (1 Cor. 14:5). He gives no warning that they should beware of demonic counterfeit or even think that this would be a possibility when they use this gift.

The theological reason underlying Paul's encouragement at that point is the fact that the Holy Spirit is working powerfully within the lives of believers. Paul says, "I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says 'Jesus is accursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). Here Paul reassures the Corinthians that if they are speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit working within them, they will not say, "Jesus is accursed!"⁶³ Coming as it does at the beginning of a discussion of spiritual gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:3 is intended to function as reassurance to the Corinthians who may have suspected some Christians who came from backgrounds of demon worship in the temples at Corinth: Might this demonic influence still affect their use of a spiritual gift? Paul lays down the ground rule that those who genuinely profess faith that "Jesus is Lord" are doing so by the Holy Spirit working within and that no one speaking by the power of the Holy Spirit will ever speak blasphemy or curses against Jesus.⁶⁴ This fear, then, is not one that Paul seemed troubled by. He simply encouraged believers to pray in tongues and said that if they did so they would be edifying themselves.⁶⁵

those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues." But in response to this verse it must be noted (1) that the verse probably was not originally part of Mark's gospel, since many early and very reliable manuscripts do not include Mark 16:9-20, and its doubtful status means that it is a precarious basis upon which to build doctrine (see discussion in chapter 17, p. 481); (2) that even if it is not part of Scripture, it does of course bear witness to a very early tradition in the history of the church, but even in this case, it does not affirm that all believers will speak with tongues: the immediately following phrase says, "They will pick up serpents" (v. 18), something that no responsible interpreter would say should be true of every Christian; and (3) that no connection is made between speaking in tongues and baptism in the Holy Spirit in this passage.

63. It might be objected at this point that speaking in tongues is not speech empowered by the Holy Spirit but is speech that comes from the speaker's own human spirit. But Paul clearly views all these spiritual gifts as generally *empowered* by the Holy Spirit, even the ones in which human personality

comes fully into play. This would be true of teachers and helpers and administrators, as well as those who speak with tongues. In each of these cases the active agent in performing the activity is the Christian who has the particular gift and uses it, but all these are nonetheless empowered by the Holy Spirit in their functioning, and that would be true of the gift of tongues as well.

64. Also relevant at this point is John's reassurance to his readers, in the context of demonic spirits that had gone out into the world: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

65. Some popular books have given anecdotal accounts of Christians who say they spoke in tongues for a time and then found that there was a demon within them who was empowering this speech, and the demon was cast out. (See, for example, C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* [Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987], 126-27; 188-91; 193-97.) But this is just another example of a case where experience is to be subject to Scripture and tested by Scripture, and the teaching of Scripture should not be subject to experience. We must be

k. Is Romans 8:26–27 Related to Speaking in Tongues? Paul writes in Romans 8:26–27: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Paul does not mention speaking in tongues explicitly here, and the statement is a general one concerning the life of all Christians, so it does not seem correct to say that Paul here is referring to speaking in tongues. He is referring to a more general experience that occurs in the prayer life of every Christian.

But what exactly is he talking about? Some have thought that he is referring to an intercessory activity completely imperceptible to us, in which the Holy Spirit intercedes for us by making sighs and groans to the Father. On this view, such intercessory work of the Spirit goes on continually, but we have no idea that it is happening (except for the fact that Scripture tells us this). In this way it would be similar to the intercessory work of Christ mentioned in Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.

But this does not appear to be a satisfactory explanation of the passage, for several reasons: (1) It would not seem probable that Paul would say that the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit, who is the infinite, omnipotent, omniscient God, would be carried out in “wordless groans” (literal translation of *stenagmois alalētois* in Rom. 8:26), especially when we realize that *groans* refers to the intense sighs of fatigue that are appropriate to weary, burdened creatures in a fallen world.⁶⁶ (2) Within the larger context the groanings in view seem to be those due to the burden of living in this present evil age,

careful that we not let such reports of experiences cause us to adopt a different position than Scripture itself on this issue. Specifically, if 1 Cor. 12–14 views tongues as a good gift from the Holy Spirit that is valuable for edification and for the good of the church, and if Paul can say, “I want you all to speak in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5), then interpretations of contemporary experiences that, in effect, say, “I want you all to be afraid of tongues,” go contrary to the emphasis of the New Testament. (Note Dickason’s quotation of Kurt Koch: “Seeking this gift for ourselves can be a very dangerous experience” [p. 127].) This is just not the perspective Paul has in the New Testament.

I realize that Dickason has a cessationist view with respect to speaking in tongues today (see p. 189: “I told her I doubted that there were any genuine tongues from God today in the New Testament sense”). Therefore, from his perspective, he is not making Scripture subject to experience, but sees these experiences as confirming his understanding of Scripture. (I have discussed the cessationist position in chapter 52, pp. 1271–90.)

There is the possibility of demonic counterfeit of every gift in the lives of unbelievers (see Matt. 7:22; also chapter 17, pp. 485–86, on false miracles). Therefore, the fact that there is some kind of “speaking in tongues” in pagan religions should not surprise us or cause us to think that all speaking in tongues is false. But in the lives of believers, especially when there is positive fruit in their lives and from their gifts, 1 Cor. 12:3,

1 John 4:4, Luke 11:11–13, and Matt. 7:16–20 tell us that these are not counterfeit gifts but real gifts from God. We must remember that Satan and demons do not do good; they do evil; and they do not bring blessing; they bring destruction.

(Neil T. Anderson, in *The Bondage Breaker* [Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990], 159–60, relates a story of a man who was apparently a Christian and who had a counterfeit gift of tongues. But Anderson notes that the gift was conferred on the man “by false teachers” [p. 159] and that this “gift” brought obviously destructive consequences in the man’s life. These factors, and not just the words of a demon as the only evidence, gave clear indication of the counterfeit nature of that supposed “gift.” Unlike Dickason, Anderson affirms that he is not opposed to speaking in tongues; see p. 160.)

An alternative explanation for the stories given by Dickason is to say that the demons who said they were “tongues spirits,” and that they came in when some charismatics laid hands on the Christian in question, were lying. Satan “is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44), and he would love to have Christians afraid of as many of the Holy Spirit’s gifts as possible.

⁶⁶ The word *groan* (*stenagmos*) is elsewhere used in the New Testament only at Acts 7:34, of the groanings of Israel under oppression in Egypt. But the related verb *stenazō* is used several times, always of finite creatures groaning under the burden of this fallen creation. In the immediately previous context *stenazō* refers to our groaning because our redemption is

particularly the groans associated with our suffering in this age (see vv. 17, 18, 23). (3) The verb *helps* in Romans 8:26 ("The Spirit *helps* us in our weakness") does not refer to something the Holy Spirit does *apart from us and on our behalf* but rather something the Holy Spirit does *in cooperation with us*. The verb Paul uses here (*synantilambanomai*) is also used in Luke 10:40, where Martha wants Jesus to tell Mary "to *help me*"—certainly she does not want Mary to do the food preparation *instead* of her but rather to come and take part *with* her in doing it.⁶⁷ Therefore, Paul is not talking about something the Holy Spirit does completely apart from our participation but something the Holy Spirit does in cooperation with our activity.

These reasons combine to indicate that Paul is not talking about a work of the Holy Spirit done apart from us and unknown by us but about the inarticulate sighs and groans that we utter in prayer, which the Holy Spirit then makes into effective intercession before the throne of God. We could paraphrase, "The Holy Spirit assists our prayers when he intercedes (for us) by taking our wordless groans and making them into effective prayer."⁶⁸

What is the relationship between this and speaking in tongues? There is some similarity because it is effective prayer which *we pray* even though we do not understand fully what we are praying. But there are some differences in that the sighs or groans that we utter in prayer very often relate to situations or hardships that we are very conscious of in our minds as we pray; so we know what we are praying about. But Paul says that we do not know how to pray for these situations as we ought to pray. Therefore, the Holy Spirit helps us and intercedes in these situations "according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:27). There is no explicit mention of our spirit praying (though that may indeed be true as well), nor is there mention of our mind being unfruitful or lacking understanding (though that may at times be at least partially true). Nor do these sighs or groans come forth in "other tongues" or "other languages." So there are several differences, even though Romans 8:26–27 talks about intercession that we make in sounds that are not fully understood by us, and therefore it is a phenomenon that has some similarities to speaking in tongues.

F. WORD OF WISDOM AND WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

Paul writes, "For to one is given the *word of wisdom* through the Spirit; and to another the *word of knowledge* according to the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:8 NASB; ESV

incomplete (Rom. 8:23; a related compound word is used in v. 22 of the creation itself). The verb is also used of finite creatures groaning under the burden of this creation in Mark 7:34 (Jesus as a man); 2 Cor. 5:2, 4 (believers who have a corruptible, earthly body); Heb. 13:17 (church leaders who may be tempted to groan under the burden of church leadership); and James 5:9 (a warning for Christians not to grumble or groan against one another). Though the verb was once used of Jesus who groaned while under the limitations of this human existence, it does not seem an appropriate term to use of the activity of the Holy

Spirit, who would not experience a similar weakness because he never took on human nature.

67. Though the word is not elsewhere used in the New Testament, its sense is also transparent from the *syn* ("with") prefix that Paul attaches to a very common word for "help."

68. An alternative view is found in the helpful discussion by Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 522–27, who understands the groans to be not ours but the Holy Spirit's.