

The Gift of Tongues

By Joshua John Farmer

Part one of a study of the gifts of the Spirit.

This version revised 9th September 2023.

"Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed."

~ Paul of Tarsus, 1 Corinthians 12:1.

For Arson Montoya:

"But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

(Matthew 19:30)

By the same author

"The Queen of the Seventh Age" (Sherlock Holmes investigates the Book of Revelation), available on Amazon.com.



(Also available through Amazon sites in other countries).

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I have also included a few quotations from the King James Version for comparison. I encourage readers to compare quotations with their own preferred version using <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

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About this book

"The Gift of Tongues" explains all aspects of this controversial gift. The author hopes this will help Christians with differing views understand one another's beliefs.

- Every biblical reference to the gift is considered.
- The Greek words used to describe the gift are examined.
- The gift is explained in terms of 1st century beliefs.
- Actual and claimed uses in the 1st century are examined.
- Modern and ancient uses of 'false' tongues are discussed.
- Aspects mentioned but not described by the Bible are explained.
- Modern use by individuals is compared with the Bible.
- Modern uses by Christian groups are considered.
- A case study of use, effect and abolition of tongues in the body is presented.

Bible quotes are from the New International Version. The author gives all verse numbers and encourages the reader to compare quotes with their preferred translation.

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Preface: a new look at old positions.

Speaking in tongues is probably the most controversial issue in the last hundred years of Christian experience. Very strong opinions of totally different kinds are held about the gift, even by readers who use the same Bible translation. Yet the various versions essentially say the same things about tongues. The differences are in the minds of the readers.

Believers have usually been indoctrinated with a view of tongues before they decide to study the subject, if at all. This indoctrination can make the Bible appear to say one thing to one person and another to another. But the only common ground on which contrary views can be reconciled is the same Bible which people interpret so differently.

Unless we take great care, we filter the Bible through our presumptions. Churches either assume there is nothing to teach, or they are *defined* on holding one view of tongues or another. Most people taught anything about tongues were taught a fixed view as children in an environment where everyone else held the same views. These views were taught in good faith but were almost never subject to serious challenge. Usually, the child grows into an adult with the same fixed opinion and never really questions it. This is, for any serious student of the Bible, an approach which is not honouring to God, no matter what conclusion is drawn.

It is our business to read the Bible and then ask ourselves whether we can reconcile our existing views with **everything** it says. To quote one or two verses we prefer before ignoring all the others is not intellectually honest; we must seek understanding based on **all** the Bible has to say.

Using only the Bible, I believe I can show very good reasons to re-examine all the common beliefs; just as you and I should re-examine our own beliefs, every time we read the Word. Anything which is said about the use of tongues today – for or against – can only get a fair hearing when the Bible has first been thoroughly examined.

The full list of chapters which unarguably refer to the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (or interpreting them), is as follows:

Mark 16; Acts 2, 10 and 19; 1 Corinthians 12-14.

I will consider every single reference and require my conclusions to be justified by all of them.

All quotations are from the New International Version. I considered alternatives, but for plain English, the NIV is, in my view, the best. I encourage readers to cross reference quotations using biblegateway.com or other resources. Familiar words have a strength that can be preferred to simple clarity; but unfortunately, they can also become firmly attached to one's own opinions. Reading a variety of translations helps us realise there is more than one way of reading the version we are most familiar with.

1. The evidence of Mark and Acts.

There are only three passages in the whole Bible where specific instances of speaking in tongues are described. These are all in Acts. Not even one example of interpreting a tongue is given. There are only three chapters which discuss what these gifts are, or how they should be used in the body (1 Corinthians 12-14), and one other chapter (Mark 16) simply mentions speaking in tongues. This chapter will consider Mark and Acts.

I shall consider whether each passage agrees with three well-known beliefs. In our time, they are more influential than anything written by Paul, Luke or Mark. They are so commonly held today that most committed believers probably agree with at least one.

Commonly held views about tongues.

C. Cessation.

The gift of tongues ceased with the end of the Apostolic era.

E. Evangelism.

All genuine tongues were given to enable Evangelism. Those speaking in tongues did not understand what they were saying but were understood by those who heard them.

F. First evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

All believers receive the gift of tongues at the moment they receive the Holy Spirit. Conversely, if one does not have the gift of tongues, one has not received the Holy Spirit.

To avoid using repetitive phrases, I shall refer to these beliefs using the capital letters listed above. Now let us look at the evidence of Mark and Acts.

Mark 16:17-18

And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.

To ensure readers are fully informed, I must point out the earliest copies of Mark's Gospel do not include this passage. You should form your own opinion about this matter.

This is the only time Jesus Christ is said to have mentioned the gift of tongues. Mark only tells us speaking in 'new tongues' is one of various signs that will 'accompany' those who believe. If any Christian writers think this was not the case in the Apostolic era, I am unaware of their writings.

There is no suggestion here of an end to the phenomenon, any more than preaching the Gospel was to end. Neither does this verse say tongues would continue indefinitely. Evidence for or against **C** must be found elsewhere.

Mark does not say each believer will experience all five signs; he appears to be saying the full set of signs will 'accompany' the whole body of believers. He has nothing to say about **E** or **F**.

If you think this passage says all believers will speak in tongues, it gives just as much reason to think they will all pick up snakes and not be harmed. However, many people (including the Irish) would have to visit other countries just to find a snake. This is no argument at all.

Acts 2

The gift of tongues is most strongly associated with Pentecost. Our only witness to this is Luke, writing in the Book of Acts. Hundreds of years later, Roman Catholic theologians interpreted this chapter without having seen the gifts in use, without any knowledge of early church practice, and without considering their own prejudices. Ever since then, preachers have uncritically repeated Middle Ages theology, rather than look at what Luke actually said. Consequently, readers think they know what happened and why before they read a word. This pre-conditioning is so powerful that people read Luke's words and see only what they expect.

I believe Pentecost can only be understood when one has first looked hard at everything else written about tongues. Apart from the single reference in Mark, above, every word in the Bible referring to tongues was written by Paul, or his associate Luke. We have no reason to think anything else they said about tongues contradicts Luke's account of Pentecost. Yet if you believe the prevailing views about Acts 2, the gift of tongues described in 1 Corinthians 12-14 may appear unrecognisable!

The solution is to read 1 Corinthians 12-14 *first*, then read Acts 2 *afterwards*. The events at Pentecost must have been understandable to the Corinthians. Thus, I shall consider everything else the Bible says about tongues before returning to Pentecost with fresh eyes.

Acts 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

In this case, everyone present had already spoken to one another in languages they mutually understood. Then suddenly, the Gentiles who were present began speaking in some other language, or languages. These languages were at least in part unknown to the Jews who were present. I say 'in part' because by some means they were aware the Gentiles were praising God.

The Jewish believers did not suppose these languages were known to the Gentiles but not to themselves; they identified these languages as originating with the Holy Spirit, even though not all (and possibly none) of those present understood all of the content.

This says nothing about **C**. It supports **F**, but is not proof of **F** (which would require all references in the Bible to agree, not just some). It is an absolute disproof of **E**; no-one present needed to be evangelised and everyone present already understood one another's speech.

After reviewing this passage, one could still argue tongues were *primarily* given for the reason of evangelism, though other proof would be needed; but one cannot argue this was *always* the case.

That leaves us with the question, what purpose does the gift of tongues serve when it is not being used for evangelism? We must accept there is, or was, at least one other use. Other passages in the Bible explain this in detail, but to understand Paul, we must first accept evangelism was not the sole purpose of tongues.

Acts 19:1-7

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

There is no evidence for or against **C** in this passage.

Those who have newly received the Spirit speak in tongues, but the only audience we know of is Paul. Neither Paul nor the 'disciples' needed tongues to understand one another before this. Whilst there could have been passers-by, which could not be the case in Acts 10, none are mentioned. This is a second absolute disproof of **E**, though one was enough.

This passage supports **F** but does not prove it. To prove **F**, every single New Testament account of salvation must say believers spoke in tongues the moment they were saved. We have now looked at every example of speaking in tongues outside Acts 2. Let us look at other New Testament instances of salvation or receiving the Holy Spirit.

John 20:19-22

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

There is no suggestion the disciples spoke in tongues at this time. John was present himself and would surely have mentioned this. Whilst receiving the gift of tongues clearly began at Pentecost, one cannot argue receiving the Holy Spirit also began at Pentecost, because this

incident was earlier. One might argue this was a temporary situation; so let us look at another example.

Acts 8:34-39

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

The men Paul met at Ephesus had only heard part of the Gospel (from an unknown source) and he had to advise them before they could receive the gift of tongues. However, it is impossible to believe Philip, a disciple, would preach a deficient gospel to the eunuch. Yet there is no mention of the eunuch receiving the gift of tongues at the time of his baptism. So, if **F** is true, why does the New Testament not say so in all cases? The most we can say about **F**, after reading Mark and Acts, is this: though the Bible does not say all believers spoke in tongues when they were saved, it does not specifically deny it. That is not much to build a doctrine on.

But if **F** is untrue, what can we learn from Acts 19:1-7 (Paul in Ephesus)? It shows the believer's knowledge of the Holy Spirit can greatly influence their experience of receiving Him. Ephesus is over a thousand miles from Jerusalem. It is credible that news of salvation would be garbled and incomplete in the area before Paul arrived. Luke described those present as 'disciples', so we must conclude they were earnest. They accepted Paul's teaching, so we know they were teachable. If the reader thinks these men had previously heard of Christ, then the issue is plain. These men did not know of the Holy Spirit or the spiritual gifts. It was their ignorance which had prevented them from receiving either. One might argue instead they were also ignorant of Christ, knowing only of John the Baptist. Let the reader decide.

I now return to Acts 10:44-48 (Peter with Cornelius). In Acts 8, we read believers had already been scattered through Judea and Samaria by persecution. Cornelius, who lived in Caesarea (in Samaria) probably heard of Pentecost through them. He could well have been aware tongues were a sign of receiving the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit does not, in general, force things on people. Jesus told his disciples:

Acts 1:4

... "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about."

Those who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost knew they were to receive some kind of gift from God. Cornelius and his gentile friends probably knew receiving the Spirit could result in the gift of tongues. Those who Paul met at Ephesus, did not. Therefore expectation of receiving *something* from God appears to play a part in receiving the gift of tongues.

Bible accounts refer to genuine spiritual gifts. Expectation (or effectively a requirement) of receiving tongues can arise when churches claim tongues are **the** first evidence of receiving the Spirit. This could lead new converts to believe they must 'perform' to be accepted. I believe this is a credible cause of some believers using counterfeit tongues today. But even if this is true, expectation also played an important part in receiving the *real* gift in the first century.

Conversely, teaching against tongues can prevent believers from receiving the real gift. The Spirit will not force a gift on those who have been taught it does not exist or is of the devil. Thus preaching against modern day tongues is itself sufficient to ensure a congregation never gets to see evidence for their reality.

We cannot use the Bible to infer preaching 'first evidence' ensures a real gift is always received. We can consider practical examples; but it would be wrong to do so before examining everything else the Bible says about tongues.

Summary of the evidence so far

E. Evangelism.

The idea that tongues were given **only** for evangelism is clearly false. Paul's advice to the Corinthians will show us what else they were used for, and whether this relates to evangelism in part or at all. After reviewing his words, we will revisit Acts 2.

F. First evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

If tongues are always the first evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, we must accept the Bible habitually fails to mention this, or conclude all believers will pick up snakes without being harmed, or both.

C. Cessation.

So far we have no evidence for or against this argument.

In short, at this point, the Bible has not supported any of the above beliefs. We must now look at what Paul wrote about tongues (and the gifts in general) to form a conclusion.

2. What is a spiritual gift?

Before we can study spiritual gifts, we must be quite clear what 'spiritual' meant to Paul, rather than what we assume it means.

According to an online dictionary, the word 'spiritual' has the following possible meanings:

- 1: of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit: INCORPOREAL.
- 2a: of or relating to sacred matters, e.g. 'spiritual songs'.
- 2b: ecclesiastical rather than lay or temporal, e.g. 'spiritual authority'.
- 3: concerned with religious values.
- 4: related or joined in spirit, e.g. 'our spiritual home'.
- 5a: of or relating to supernatural beings or phenomena.
- 5b: of, relating to, or involving spiritualism: SPIRITUALISTIC.

Which of these did Paul intend to convey when he wrote 1 Corinthians? A lot of contemporary theology appears to assume Paul meant 2a, 2b, 3, 4 or some combination of those meanings. However, Paul's Greek is entirely unambiguous.

The word 'spiritual' appears in the NIV 30 times. Amazingly, 27 of those uses are made by Paul, and the other three are in 1 Peter 2.

Of Paul's 27 uses, 23 are a translation of the Greek word *pneumatikos* and two of the root word *pneuma*. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, all three references are translated from *pneumatikos*. *Pneumatikos* is used only 26 times in the whole New Testament and is always translated either as 'spiritual' (25 times) or 'spiritually' (once).

The root word *pneuma* relates to *pneumatikos* in the same way that 'spirit' relates to 'spiritual'. In the New Testament we see many uses of *pneuma* in respect of evil spirits, for instance:

Matthew 12:43-45

"When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

Anything which can be driven out of a human is not itself human and is not corporeal. Here is a sample of the other references:

1 Corinthians 14:32

The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

Hebrews 1:14

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

Hebrews 12:9

... How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!

Clearly in the New Testament, 'spirit' (*pneuma*) refers to a non-corporeal intelligence. By using the word *pneuma*, the Bible says all these things are intangible personalities:

- evil spirits
- angelic spirits
- human spirits.

Therefore, when Paul refers to gifts as 'spiritual' he clearly means (1) above:

- of, relating to, consisting of, or affecting the spirit: INCORPOREAL.

Nothing Paul calls a spiritual gift relates to sacred matters, ecclesiastical matters, religious values, or vague notions of spirituality outside faith ... least of all Spiritualism.

5a, relating to supernatural beings or phenomena may be relevant, since the incorporeal human spirit is by definition supernatural; but when Paul is not referring to angels or demons, (1) is clearly what his Greek text implies.

So what *is* the human spirit, as defined by the Bible? Here are some examples of the use of *pneuma* in respect of human spirits:

Luke 8:53-55

They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. ...

Luke 23:46

Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Acts 7:59

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

The human spirit is not the same thing as the Holy Spirit; the Father is not Father to the Holy Spirit, but to human spirits. Neither is the spirit the 'soul':

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When the Bible refers to **both** the soul and the spirit, it shows the writers did not consider these two things the same. However, when it says the word of God penetrates '**even**' to dividing them, it shows the writers considered them closely related.

The Greek word translated as 'soul' is *psyche* (also sometimes written in English as *psuche*). The English words 'psyche' and 'psychology' are both derived from this Greek word. As *pneuma* is to *pneumatikos*, so *psyche* is to *psychikos*.

Psyche (or *psuche*) is typically defined as follows:

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/kjv/psuche.html>

breath; life; the vital force which animates the body and shows itself in breathing; that in which there is life; a living being, a living soul; the seat of the feelings, desires, affections, aversions (our heart, soul etc.); the (human) soul in so far as it is constituted that by the right use of the aids offered it by God it can attain its highest end and secure eternal blessedness; the soul regarded as a moral being designed for everlasting life; the soul as an essence which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death (distinguished from other parts of the body).

So 'psyche' is ambiguous. It can refer to aspects of the human mind and feelings. Because of the possible overlap in meaning, one can see why the Bible says the soul and spirit are hard to divide. But it is absolutely clear *pneumatikos* always refers to incorporeal spirits, not the mind. By contrast *psychikos* is translated as 'natural', 'sensual' or '**without** the spirit'.

If Paul had wanted to say the gifts he calls 'spiritual' had been a part of our mind or our feelings, he would have used words rooted in 'psyche'. But 'psyche' does not even occur in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Thus, Paul *must* be referring to gifts of the human spirit alone. To summarise:

In 1 Corinthians, 'spiritual' unambiguously means matters relating to the non-corporeal, eternal aspect of human nature which is neither mind, nor body, nor the soul.

How, then, can we suppose any gifts of mind or body are 'spiritual' gifts? Paul excludes gifts of mind and body by using *pneumatikos* instead of *psychikos*. We will only understand Paul if we make the same distinction ourselves.

Let us look at speaking in tongues. How does it work? The Bible always says those speaking in tongues do not understand what they are saying. We know the speaker cannot understand the words they are speaking, because if they did so, this would be considered perfectly normal. This means the gift **cannot** be a gift of the human mind. Speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift precisely because it is performed by the human spirit, empowered by God, speaking through those who have been given the gift.

Some may find it hard to understand how the human spirit can speak through the believer's mouth. However, any such inability does not refute the obvious; it cannot possibly be the mind which speaks in tongues. There are various occasions in the Gospel when evil spirits (*pneuma*) speak through humans in a language known to the speaker and the hearers. But evil spirits are gatecrashers, whereas the human spirit is present by right. It must be easier for your own spirit to speak through your mouth than for an evil spirit to do so!

Very well, if we accept the human spirit speaks through a believer's mouth, why not do so in their native language? Simply because to do so invites the mind to interrupt.

When considering whether one may be born with spiritual gifts, some may say 'What about Jeremiah?', to whom God said:

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."

But if so, one must remember the same God also did the following:

1 Kings 3:5

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon asks for wisdom. God then says because Solomon has answered in such a way, He will give Solomon both wisdom and much else besides. Solomon asks because he knows he does not already have. God does not reply Solomon received the gift at birth. If Solomon had done so, why would God not tell him he already had it?

It is no use trying to select which of these two passages is true and which is to be ignored. We must reconcile them, and they can easily be reconciled. Simply, God always has foreknowledge; but His foreknowledge of the gifts He will give a person is not the same thing as receiving them. God knows the day you will die; does that also mean you live your entire life dead? Or do you die on the last day of your life?

Being appointed a prophet before you are born does not mean you are able to prophesy from within the womb or before that. Jeremiah does not tell us he did either. It means God **foreknew** He would be giving Jeremiah the gift of prophecy, **later**. To suppose otherwise suggests God's conversation with Solomon was **meaningless**, as Solomon must have already received any spiritual gift he could ask God for. God gave (or foreknew he would give) Jeremiah a **role** before he was born; but Jeremiah was not under the impression he had that role or that gift until God told him it was so. That was when Jeremiah received the gift of prophecy. Arguably it was also when he received the role. From Jeremiah's point of view, it was certainly the moment at which he received both the role and the gift. We should not confuse Jeremiah's point of view with God's foreknowledge.

If one thinks a person 'has' a gift when they have never used it, have no idea they have it and are physically incapable of using it (for instance, in the womb), that just means we do not understand what is meant by the English word 'have'.

Let us consider how spiritual gifts were received in the Apostolic era. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 12:31

Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

If the Corinthians were to 'eagerly desire the greater gifts', they must first understand they *did not have them*. God already knew whether they would eventually get them or not. But that was not the same thing as having them, until the believer received them. Today, believers often have little idea what their spirit is, and if they have any, they mostly confuse it with their soul. This is because we live in a society with a very different worldview to the one Paul lived in. We need to realise he, and those he was writing to, did not share in this lack of understanding. So how would gifts be defined as spiritual or otherwise in Paul's time?

Since the spiritual gifts Paul describes were confined to believers, how can we say the believer was born with them? One is not born a believer or a Christian, so how can one be born with gifts unique to Christians?

The Bible shows us no-one spoke in tongues before they received the Holy Spirit. Did this also apply to other spiritual gifts? The key questions when considering whether a gift is 'spiritual' or not are:

- Could an atheist or a pagan have the gift?
- Could anyone be born with the gift?

Could an atheist be a prophet, and have the gift of prophecy? Surely not. Any prophet not directly spoken through by God was a false prophet. But what if an unbeliever was saved and then went on to use the gift of prophecy? They must have received the gift at some time after they were saved, not before.

What about teaching? Many of us have been taught valuable secular knowledge by capable teachers who were atheists. Does this mean an atheist could have had a spiritual gift? Atheists have a spirit, as does everyone else, but teaching is a capability of the *mind*, not the spirit (*pneuma*). One may teach about spiritual things; but that does not mean teaching about them is a spiritual gift, any more than teaching Roman history would make someone a Roman or sleeping in the garage would make me a car.

Teaching (and other gifts of the mind and body) are and were 'natural' gifts which atheists, pagans and Christians could all have. Such gifts may be apparent from a very early age; my daughter-in-law was excitedly teaching her brother from the age of five and is now a qualified teacher. Suppose a talented teacher was saved in middle age. Would Paul say to them, 'You need to receive the spiritual gift of teaching before you can teach theology?' No, after they had time to study theology just as they studied anything else, their gift for teaching (which they were born with) would be just as relevant to teaching religious knowledge as it was to teaching philosophy, cooking or rhetoric.

Could an unbeliever have been good at helping other people? Could they be generous? Yes, they could. I know plenty myself today. They can and could be moral, considerate, brave and many other things. But they could not have what Paul describes as spiritual gifts, because these are specific to Christian believers.

It was and is right to give thanks to God for 'natural' gifts, both those we have ourselves and those others use to serve God. Such gifts are valuable to the body of Christ. But they are not what Paul was talking about when he referred to 'spiritual gifts'; it is vitally important for us to understand this distinction.

So how did the Corinthians, and others, receive the spiritual gifts they were told to eagerly desire? Why did Paul not explain how they were to get them? The answer is simple; all they had to do was eagerly desire them. Then the Holy Spirit would, in His time, prepare believers for the gifts, give them gifts fitted to the service they were called to, and show those newly empowered how to use them. All the believer was asked to do, was eagerly desire the gifts.

Conversely, how could believers have been asked to do more? What set of actions would have made them wise enough to receive the gifts, worthy to receive them, or important enough to

do so? None. Their job was to provide the desire. Any preparation they needed was provided through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

This then leads to the matter of cessation, **C**. Did God stop giving the spiritual gifts to believers, and does the Bible say so? I will consider the relevant arguments when we look at 1 Corinthians 13.

Having shown what Paul really meant when he wrote *pneuma* or *pneumatikos*, which we read in English as 'spiritual', we must now look at assumptions made about spiritual things today. We need to get rid of the prejudices of our time before we can truly understand what the Corinthians believed Paul meant when he wrote to them.

3. Understanding Paul.

When we read the New Testament, we should try to understand Paul, not 'coach' him. We often 'coach' Paul without realising we are doing so; we do so when we read his words with a worldview Paul never held or even imagined. To understand Paul's words, we must understand how contemporary worldviews differ from his.

Throughout the Western world in the last hundred years, the word 'spirit' has become regarded as an attitude of the mind, even by most believers. Because of this, believers misread what Paul wrote without realising they are doing so. They conclude one subject is spiritual, whereas another is not. Thinking about a supposedly spiritual topic is then considered a spiritual activity. However, in the New Testament, 'spiritual' refers only to matters relating to incorporeal spirits, never to ideas of any kind, nor to thinking about them.

Some believers are sceptical of all spiritual things (as defined by Paul) because they hold a materialist worldview the Bible does not teach. This quotation from Wikipedia is typical of what many people believe today ... whether they realise they believe it, or not.

Materialism ... holds that matter is the fundamental substance in nature, and that all things, including mental aspects and consciousness, are results of material interactions. According to this doctrine the material creates and determines consciousness, not vice versa. ... Materialism is closely related to physicalism, the view that all that exists is ultimately physical.

It is vital we understand materialism is a philosophy and not a fact. This philosophy is entirely contrary to Paul's beliefs about the human spirit and all other kinds of spirits. Paul believed the human spirit was immortal, entirely non-corporeal, and by implication not subject to what we call physical law.

Speaking as a physics graduate, if we say physics consists only of things which can be measured, by doing so we define the boundaries of physics, not the boundaries of reality. They are only the same if nothing exists which cannot be measured. Saying so is a statement of non-religious belief. Furthermore, that belief is inherently unprovable.

If we say, 'everything outside the atmosphere is not the earth', this does not mean outer space ceases to exist; we have said what is the earth and what is outer space. Likewise, when we say physics measures only what can be measured, we have said nothing about what lies outside physics, and have in no way prevented anything outside physics from existing. To suppose physics has 'proved' spiritual things do not exist is comparable to saying electricity does not exist because we cannot measure it with a ruler.

In the last hundred years, physics has abandoned the clockwork universe understood by Newton, in which all things could be calculated. Instead, it has encountered the mysteries of quantum mechanics ("QM"). In QM, observations by conscious minds govern what matter does and does not do; yet the average person who trusts in 'science' supposes matter determines what consciousness is. Their beliefs about science are a hundred years behind the discoveries of science, and entirely contrary to them.

Paul believed the human spirit was outside physics, was created by God alone and capable of many things science does not (and cannot) study. If we want to understand Paul's writings, we must first set aside materialism and try to understand his beliefs.

Conversely, some believers are credulous about spiritual matters to the point of being in error. John advises us not to be credulous:

1 John 4:1

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

We cannot assume all spiritual phenomena are of God; to do so opens us to every kind of error. We must try to determine which spiritual phenomena are of God, and which are not. Those who believe in incorporeal spirits must accept Paul, not they, is the authority on the matter. If we have our own ideas about spirits and substitute them for Paul's without realising it, we will again not even find out what he meant.

Understanding Paul does not mean having an unprovable theory we believe correct; it is to have ideas we can test in practice. Then we will find out whether we were right or not.

1 Corinthians 4:19-20

But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

If your church talks a good Gospel but is not transforming the lives of those within, then it is all talk and no power. No matter how much you like the sound of your ideas, if they do not change lives, Paul considered such ideas worthless. He expected true theology to result in spiritual power. He saw the absence of spiritual power accompanied by much talk as evidence only of arrogance. Paul's test of beliefs about the spiritual gifts was this; do they result in spiritual power?

To those who think Paul's view of the gifts can no longer be tested, I suggest you read on. We have yet to consider the rest of Paul's writings about the gifts. This chapter exists to ensure we read the Bible trying to understand Paul, not to coach him. To understand Paul we must consider a world in which spiritual gifts were an everyday reality, whether we consider this to be the case today, or not. Only when we have done so will we know what Paul meant.

Three misconceptions to avoid:

- 1) Those who trust in science (of whom very few are trained scientists) may think the supernatural, if it exists, has no mind of its own. If they consider the supernatural at all, they try to put it in a bottle and experiment on it. However, spirits are always represented in the Bible as intelligent beings, not natural forces. The Bible tells us we are in the bottle and the supernatural is experimenting on us.
- 2) Credulous churches may assume all things apparently spiritual in nature are from God. Such a choice ensures godly spiritual experiences are crowded out by fakes. Sceptical visitors may then conclude the counterfeits on show imply no real spiritual experiences are possible today.

- 3) Sceptical churches fail to realise teaching **C** (cessation), whether true or not, is self-fulfilling. In the Bible, teaching about spiritual gifts could be necessary before they occurred. For instance, the men Paul met at Ephesus in Acts 19:1-7 had not heard of the Holy Spirit, and received the gift of tongues only when Paul explained the matter. Paul's readers did not receive the gifts unless they desired them, but if we tell people the gifts are unobtainable, they will not desire them and will not receive them. Thus it is hard to distinguish between God withdrawing the gifts and churches teaching He has done so, as both lead to the same results. This is an issue I shall consider later when looking at 1 Corinthians 13.

We will best understand what the Bible says when we have experienced things it describes, but we are more likely to experience such things when we have understood the Bible. If this sounds circular and there appears no road to understanding, you have my sympathy. To solve the problem, let us continue to read Paul. But we can only understand him if we first set aside our own worldview and try to see things as he did.

Everything the Bible says about the purpose of tongues and their correct use is in 1 Corinthians 12, 13 and 14. I shall devote a chapter of my own to each of Paul's chapters. The few verses I have not discussed say nothing about the gift of tongues.

4. The evidence of 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12:1-3

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

[Note: in verse one, the NIV has 'gifts of the Spirit', whereas the KJV has 'spiritual gifts'. In both cases the word 'gifts' is inferred by the translator rather than being present in the Greek, and the KJV acknowledges this. In all other cases in this chapter (verses 4, 9, 28, 30 and 31, below), *charisma* (gifts) is present in the Greek where translated.]

Even if you utterly disagree with others about tongues, Paul tells us anyone who says "Jesus is Lord" speaks by the Holy Spirit. It is very easy to dismiss arguments, but it is not so easy to dismiss people. Paul says it is not our business to do so if they, like we, say "Jesus is Lord". All writings about tongues are controversial. I hope those who disagree with me will accept I have based my conclusions on a determined attempt to read the Bible honestly.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Paul distinguishes between gifts, service (translated in other versions as ministries, or administrations), and 'working'. (Other translations render 'working' as activities, operations or even 'results'.) In essence these are:

- The God-given ability to do a thing.
- A life dedicated to service; a ministry.
- Valuable work to be done, less demanding than a ministry.

I shall refer to spiritual gifts, ministries and work. I shall where necessary use 'role' to refer to both ministries and work.

According to <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>, the Greek *charisma*, translated here as 'gifts', is used with the following meanings in the New Testament:

- i) A favour one receives without any merit of one's own.
- ii) The gift of divine grace.
- iii) The gift of faith, knowledge, holiness, virtue.
- iv) The economy of divine grace, by which the pardon of sin and eternal salvation is appointed to sinners in consideration of the merits of Christ laid hold of by faith.
- v) Grace or gifts denoting extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating on their souls by the Holy Spirit.

Those written to in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are already saved, so (iv) is not an issue. These chapters talk about specific gifts rather than God's grace in general, so (ii) is not in context.

The only advice Paul gives about receiving gifts is to 'eagerly desire' them, so we may reasonably infer (i) applies (that the spiritual gifts are not received on account of merit). Thus the only question remaining is whether these chapters refer to (v), extraordinary powers, or the rather gentler characteristics listed in (iii).

I have already explained *pneumatikos* ('spiritual') refers to matters of the incorporeal human spirit; thus in 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul's use of *pneumatikos* (spiritual) *charisma* (gifts) implies he is talking about (v), extraordinary powers. Where (v) refers to the human soul, this is just another case of the soul and the spirit being misunderstood.

Some might argue when God gives servants to the church, those servants receive a gift; a ministry. But Paul says gifts, ministries and work are three different things. Why should we think a believer wrong to advance the same argument today? This will be important when we come to review what Paul calls a gift, what he calls a ministry and what he calls work.

Many jobs require natural gifts or may be better performed by those who can use them. However, the gift is not the same as the job. In Florida, being able to speak both English and Spanish makes one better able to work as a bank teller. The (natural) gift of learning a language enhances a bank employee's ability to serve the public; but they must also be numerate. The job is bank teller, whereas the gifts are 'Spanish speaker' and 'numeracy'. Not all roles are gifts, and not all gifts are roles. There is an overlap, but this does not make roles and gifts the same thing.

1 Corinthians 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Personal use of tongues is an exception (1 Corinthians 14:3-4, "Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves ...")

1 Corinthians 12:8-10

To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

This is a list of **spiritual gifts**. Later, Paul makes a separate list of **ministries** and **work**. As he explains in verses four to six, gifts, ministries and work are not the same thing.

Paul does not say "every believer has the gift of tongues and has done so since the moment they received the Spirit". Neither does he say, "but tongues are only given to those who travel to evangelise in foreign lands." Plain English tells us in Paul's time, some had the gift of tongues and others did not. It would be remarkable for Paul to say this if every believer had the gift of tongues from the moment they received the Holy Spirit. 'Another' **cannot** mean 'everyone'.

If we insist on **F**, either Paul is in error or simply careless. If one believes Paul understood what he was saying and took care over it, **F** is no longer supportable. We must decide whether Paul is in error, or we are. I doubt any modern believer knows better than Paul.

1 Corinthians 12:24-26 (passing over 1 Corinthians 12:11-23)

--- But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Paul does not regard those who speak in tongues as dispensable. He sees them as a necessary part of the whole, without whom the body is not fully equipped for service. Once again, if those with tongues were a part, not the whole, some believers cannot have had the gift of tongues in Paul's time.

1 Corinthians 12:27

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

No believer is separate from the body.

1 Corinthians 12:28

And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

[Note: the NIV 1984 has 'gifts of administration' rather than 'guidance'. The KJV refers to 'governments'. The Greek is *kybernēsis*, from a word meaning 'to steer'. In 'gifts of administration', the word 'gifts' was inferred by the translator, rather than being present.]

In verses eight to ten, Paul unambiguously refers to gifts given by the Holy Spirit.

- If Paul thought being an apostle, teaching, helping and guidance were spiritual gifts, why did he not include them in verses eight to ten?
- If verse twenty-eight is also a list of spiritual gifts, why does Paul not refer here to wisdom, knowledge, faith and distinguishing between spirits?

In verses four to six, Paul says gifts, ministries and work are different things.

In verses eight to ten, Paul refers to **spiritual gifts**.

In verse twenty-eight, Paul refers to **ministries** and **work**.

Apostles, prophets and teachers are not gifts; they are **people** who perform ministries. By using ordinal numbers to refer to these people, Paul has ranked them ahead of those with other roles. Being an apostle, prophet or teacher becomes the primary focus of a believer's life. Other kinds of work in the body are less demanding.

Paul considers doing miracles, gifts of healing, helping, guidance and speaking different kinds of tongues as **work**. The difference between work and a ministry is work need not be the primary thing in your life. Usually you can mix these activities with a regular life, whereas apostles, prophets and teachers have to focus first on their calling.

Thus verse twenty-eight is not a list of spiritual gifts. Some of the roles listed in this verse require spiritual gifts to achieve them, others do not; they are all roles in the body of Christ, but as I observed above, a role and a gift are not the same thing. Further, some roles, such as helping and guidance, can be fulfilled using natural gifts rather than spiritual gifts.

If we accept this verse is a list of ministries and work, not of gifts, everything fits with verse four. Paul has talked about gifts, ministries and work as separate things in their due order. But if we insist this is a second list of spiritual gifts, we ignore the unambiguous meaning of *pneumatikos*. Also we must ask why Paul made two separate lists of gifts. The two have partially overlapping content. A single comprehensive list of gifts would have been much better. Making two lists of gifts would muddle the issues.

In fact Paul has made one list of gifts and another list about ministries and work. The muddle does not result from Paul's writing, but from people supposing two lists about different subjects are both about the same subject. This confused reading is made more plausible by failing to understand the difference between natural and spiritual gifts, but even if one does not accept that difference, verse twenty-eight still works best as a list of roles, not of gifts.

Being an Apostle is a ministry, not a spiritual gift. An Apostle will need and use a variety of spiritual and natural gifts. They will probably be recognised as an Apostle on account of this. But the role of apostle is not in itself a spiritual gift.

Prophets necessarily use the gift of prophecy; without it they cannot be prophets at all. But the ministry is an activity performed by a person, whereas the spiritual gift is an ability given to a person. In this case the role *requires* the gift of prophecy, making this role more closely identifiable with a gift than any other; but it does not preclude the prophet from having additional spiritual or natural gifts. Indeed without additional gifts, a prophet will have a very hard time functioning at all. I hope to elaborate on this in a later work.

Teaching is a natural gift. No-one can give a true prophecy without having the gift of prophecy, but many of us have learned secular knowledge from gifted teachers who were not believers. Good teachers, whether believers or atheists, all have a natural gift, as opposed to a supernatural, spiritual gift. Teaching is a gift exercised by use of the mind; prophecy and other spiritual gifts are exercised by the spirit of the believer, not by their mind. That is why they are called spiritual gifts.

Miracles, gifts of healing and tongues are all spiritual gifts. They are not possible for the mind or body and are exercised through the spirit of those having the gift. But the role of using these gifts does not preclude believers from also having other gifts, either spiritual or natural.

Helping and guidance are important roles in the body of Christ, but they are performed using the mind and body. Natural gifts will assist in these roles, but atheists may also have such gifts.

Which is more realistic?

- Paul, who knew the spiritual gifts first hand, became muddled and disorganised when speaking of them, making two overlapping lists rather than one.
- Modern writers with no miraculous gifts have missed the point; spiritual gifts and roles are different things, but in some cases, a role may require a spiritual gift.

The latter makes much more sense to me.

1 Corinthians 12:29-31

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

Paul would not ask these questions if all believers received the gift of tongues when they received the Holy Spirit. His words imply there must be others who have received the gifts of healing, prophecy, etc. without also receiving the gift of tongues.

We must very carefully examine the statement "*Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*"

Firstly, this suggests some gifts are greater than others; yet Paul has already shown us the body is only complete when all the gifts are present. So the above does not suggest 'greater' gifts are a reason for ignoring 'smaller' ones. Some gifts are greater than others, but none are to be ignored.

I have heard a preacher suggest the gift of tongues is to be compared with 'smoking and drinking'. But this directly challenges the words of our Lord:

Luke 11:11-13

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

People who suggest the Father would give second rate, questionable or 'bad' gifts to believers not only deny this verse but call into question everything Jesus said about the Father's nature. The spiritual gifts are **absolutely good**, or our Heavenly Father would not give them.

Secondly, we should **eagerly desire** greater gifts. How can one 'eagerly desire' something they already have? If one believes all gifts are given at birth, Paul clearly disagrees.

Why does Paul encourage his readers to desire the greater gifts? Not because ministries are the same as gifts, but because the 'greater gifts' fit believers for a more exalted ministry.

Those who assume spiritual gifts continue today usually confuse gifts of the mind and body with those of the spirit. Paul does not. We shall go on to consider whether any spiritual gifts are given today. But to teach mind and body perform acts only possible for the believer's spirit contradicts the clear distinction between *pneuma* and *psyche*.

We should rightly give thanks to God for both natural and spiritual gifts, and the body of Christ is enhanced by both. But when Paul refers to spiritual gifts, he refers to the list in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and **nothing else**:

- the message of wisdom
- the message of knowledge
- faith
- gifts of healing
- miraculous powers
- prophecy
- distinguishing between spirits
- speaking in different kinds of tongues
- interpretation of tongues.

Summary of natural and spiritual gifts

1. *Spiritual gifts are not 'kinds of service' or ministries. Ministries and 'kinds of service' are not spiritual gifts, though some require specific spiritual gifts and others may be empowered by them.*
2. *Spiritual gifts may only be received by believers. No-one is born a believer. Therefore spiritual gifts are not received at birth.*
3. *God foreknows who will receive a spiritual gift, just as He foreknows who will and will not be saved. You are not saved until you believe the Gospel, and you do not experience genuine spiritual gifts before you are saved.*
4. *Natural gifts may be experienced by anyone, whether they believe or not. It is common for evidence of them to be apparent from an early age.*
5. *Natural and spiritual gifts are both valuable to the body. We should give thanks to God for both; but we should not confuse one with the other.*
6. *No unbeliever with what appears to be a supernatural gift has received it from God. If they later get saved and go on to receive a genuine spiritual gift, this does not mean they had it beforehand.*
7. *Confusing natural and spiritual gifts leads to muddled teaching about how and when they may be received. The results of that, which I am familiar with first hand, can be disastrous.*

Believers do not receive the gift of tongues at birth. No-one has ever done so. The primary qualification for receiving the gift of tongues is to 'eagerly desire' it. In the Bible we see many believers received the gift at the moment of their salvation, but we also see this was not true in all cases.

5. The evidence of 1 Corinthians 13.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

[Note: both the NIV and the KJV have 'the gift of prophecy'. The Greek is *prophēteia*. The KJV correctly points out 'the gift of' is inferred, rather than present in the Greek text.]

Paul's comment about the 'tongues of angels' only makes sense if some tongues are unique to angels. If so, then what would believers find them useful for? This will be considered below. But we cannot suppose tongues spoken only by angels are of any use for evangelism! Unless the reader thinks Paul is speaking figuratively, this is another disproof of **E**.

Paul neither says love is a replacement for spiritual gifts, nor spiritual gifts replace love. His purpose is to show the gifts should be used **in** and **with** love.

Now we come to an argument some use to support **C** (cessation).

1 Corinthians 13:8-13 (passing over verses 4-7)

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

We should examine the whole paragraph rather than seizing on individual phrases whilst ignoring the rest.

1 Corinthians 13:8

... But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

There is no doubt Paul is saying these things will end. But does the rest of this passage tell us when this will be?

1 Corinthians 13:12

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

It is clear by 'now' Paul refers to the prevailing conditions in his time, which will last until 'then', whenever 'then' may be.

1 Corinthians 13:9-10 (NIV)

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.

1 Corinthians 13:9-10 (KJV)

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

I find it impossible to conclude 'then' means any other time than when 'perfection' or 'completeness' has come. But Paul explains this will happen at a time when we:

- know Jesus Christ face to face.
- know God perfectly.

These things are only possible:

- after the Second Coming
- or in heaven
- or if we think we see Jesus face to face by reading the Bible.

Paul had a vision of Christ on the day he was saved. If Paul thought seeing a vision once was the same as continually seeing Jesus face to face, he would not use the future tense to say so. I know of one man who claims he was visited by Christ, who came to meet him in a spaceship. Every other believer I have met expects they will only see Christ face to face in heaven or after the Second Coming.

The question which remains, for some, is whether Paul thought the completion of the New Testament was the same thing as seeing Jesus face to face. If so, I ask you this. After the Second Coming or when you are in heaven, will you then spend your time reading the Bible, or seeking the company of Jesus in person? Would there be nothing to gain by meeting Him? And if there is, how have we already attained perfection?

Some of the people Paul wrote to had met Jesus personally before the Ascension. Those who had not stood a good chance of meeting someone who had. For instance, John ended his life with authority over the churches of Asia Minor. Perhaps most of the believers in what is now Turkey had heard John speak. Does my reader really think Paul could convince his readers, or intended to convince his readers, of the following? One day it would be possible to know Jesus just as well by reading a book as John had known Him in Judea? Or to know Jesus as well by reading a book as anyone could after His Second Coming, or in heaven?

Even if you really think this is true, by what means can you definitively prove Paul meant this? How can you show he did not mean to imply we would know Christ completely in heaven or after the Second Coming? If you say the gifts ceased after the end of the Apostolic era and therefore Paul must have been referring to that time, you must then prove the gifts 'ceased' using a historical argument, not a biblical one; and you would still have to prove this somehow implied completeness, or perfection.

Paul and the other New Testament writers were certain of the Second Coming. However, the presentation of their words as a single document all could read, was something they probably thought could not be achieved before that!

At least 1500 years passed after Paul's death before literate people could read a Bible in their own language. Until then, people only knew what priests told them about the Bible. Was that really perfection, or completeness? Is that as good as meeting Jesus in person?

Some think the only true version of the Bible is the King James Version. Others make the same argument about the Geneva Bible! But the same people usually think the gifts ceased once the Apostles finished writing the New Testament. I find those positions to be a complete contradiction; if perfection came with the completion of Revelation, why was there no true version of the Bible for another 1500 years?

The New Testament warns us of a future where there are false prophets, false signs and false gifts. For instance:

Matthew 24:24

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

This is not the only such quotation in the Bible (it is repeated in Mark, for instance); but though the Bible says there will be false messiahs and deceptive signs, nowhere does it say real signs and wonders are to cease. There were false prophets such as Hananiah in Jeremiah's time. Does that mean Jeremiah was also a false prophet? Surely not. Then neither should we suppose the appearance of false prophets in future will invalidate real ones, unless the Bible explicitly says so, and the Bible does not say so.

If you still think, for whatever reason, completeness or perfection came at the end of the Apostolic era and this was what Paul intended us to think, we must agree to disagree. My sole objective is to read the Bible without allowing preconceptions to interfere with its plain meaning. I hope you will admit I have been just as purposeful in demolishing arguments you do not agree with as I have in opposing those you do agree with!

But if Paul did not mean the gifts would cease shortly after his death, what do his words tell us? Clearly in heaven we will not need the spiritual gifts. What will there be to prophesy? Who will need to be evangelised? What will there be to know about God which is not fully known? But meanwhile, the church on earth, which has not yet seen Jesus face to face, is in desperate need of the spiritual gifts.

Many preachers will tell you God does miracles today, but not through the gifts, because they have been withdrawn. They suggest instead God does miracles in response to prayer. But at what point were the spiritual gifts exercised by the Apostles other than by a command given in Jesus' name, which is to say, a prayer?

Acts 3:6-8

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

If we command a limb to be healed today, and the limb is healed, have we used a spiritual gift, or have we prayed? There is no difference between commanding a limb to be healed now and doing so in the Apostolic era. If some are able today, as I have myself witnessed, to heal a limb with a command in Jesus' name, and the healed person comes to believe in Jesus as a direct result, how was this done by Satan?

If, by practice, we become skilled at praying for healing, how good must we get before we can be said to have a spiritual gift? Will God tell us we must not improve, in case we should develop a spiritual gift? Surely not.

Thus the idea God does miracles by prayer today, but not through spiritual gifts, is entirely *meaningless*. Either both miracles and the gifts have ceased, or both remain active. Yet this is not to say there are no false gifts today. I have every reason to believe both real and false gifts are now in use. The problem with supposing all of them false, is this leaves us no godly spiritual weapons with which to oppose those of Satan. So if you think the gifts have ceased, God has left us at Satan's mercy. Is that what you think He would want?

In any other field of human endeavour, we believe those who can do a thing understand it. In contemporary theology, excellence consists of explaining why no-one may do a thing, or why those who can do things are wrong even to try. But if preachers spent as much energy trying to follow Paul's advice as they spent inventing meaningless arguments, they would heal many and change their tune. Jesus said to Nicodemus:

John 3:11

Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony.

It is just the same today. Anywhere you go in the USA, you will find people who know someone who was saved and healed by miraculous power in the 1990s. For some reason this has become much rarer. Many of those who saw things happening in the 90s are no longer expecting them to happen and no longer talk of them. Towards the end of this book, I will do my best to explain why.

There are far more reasons to counterfeit things which still exist than to counterfeit those which are bygone. Counterfeit signs and wonders bring real signs and wonders into disrepute. That is a major reason why Satan empowers counterfeit signs and wonders today. It is not because Jesus is visible to each of us face to face! It is because Satan desperately needs us to throw away the weapons God gave us to fight him with. He wants to postpone the coming wrath, the time of which is unknown to him, as long as possible. He wants to ruin the lives of mankind as effectively and viciously as he can whilst he is still able to do so.

Counterfeiting our best means of defence is vital to Satan's strategy; it has caused many to ignore the weapons God gives, then try fighting Satan without them. If you do that, you will lose. Whilst we bicker about whether God empowers miracles today or not, Satan just gets on with doing evil. Nobody ever told him to stop. That was our job, but we refused to use the weapons we were given. How can anyone wonder why we are losing?

Summary:

Paul makes no argument suggesting cessation of tongues or prophecy will happen at any time before the believer enters heaven or Jesus returns. In that future day, the spiritual gifts will be relics of a past which can never be returned to, and none will desire a return to.

6. The evidence of 1 Corinthians 14.

1 Corinthians 14:1

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.

[Note: in verses one and twelve, the NIV has 'gifts of the Spirit', whereas the KJV has 'spiritual gifts'. In each case, the word 'gifts' is inferred rather than present in the Greek, and the KJV acknowledges this.]

This is the *second time* Paul tells us to eagerly desire the gifts. How about doing as he says?

AND. The gifts and love are not substitutes for one another.

DESIRE. He who has a thing does not desire to obtain it.

OF THE SPIRIT. Not all God's gifts are 'of the Spirit'. If they were, adding the words 'of the Spirit' would be superfluous.

ESPECIALLY. Paul indicates prophecy is especially important. But he does not suggest other gifts should be ignored.

It is amazing just how many fallacies of modern theology fall apart if you simply take the above verse at face value.

1 Corinthians 14:2

For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.

If so, how can tongues be purely or even mainly for evangelism? Paul can scarcely have been unaware of the day of Pentecost, unless he utterly refused to read his associate Luke's writings, or refused to listen to the most startling story, outside his own life, since the Ascension.

Here Paul shows us the primary, if not exclusive purpose of speaking in tongues, is **to converse with God**. Of this we have no biblical examples. But this does not mean it did not happen. First, we have only three examples of tongues being used. Second, if one conversed with God in tongues, what could be recorded about the matter in the writings of men? For this reason alone, we do not have examples in the Bible; nothing comprehensible could be said about talking to God in tongues unless it was subsequently interpreted.

To find out what Paul meant, we must read him bearing in mind tongues are **primarily** a way to communicate with God. If you resist that thought, you are free to remove this verse from your Bible. But you will find a lot of others must go, too. This is what Paul says speaking in tongues is *for*. He does not say it is for evangelism. So on what basis can we say tongues are 'for' evangelism and not 'for' talking to God?

1 Corinthians 14:3-4

But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort. Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, but the one who prophesies edifies the church.

Again, Paul says tongues are used to talk to God and thus edify the speaker. (Edify: to instruct and improve someone, particularly in a moral or religious context). Such a conversation does not edify the congregation, because they do not understand the words. The speaker's mind does not understand, either; but their spirit understands, and edifies the speaker through its prayers.

1 Corinthians 14:5

I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be edified.

Clearly Paul is referring to gifts being used in the congregation. Paul wants all believers to speak in tongues – but to God, and alone, not for evangelical purposes, which he never even suggests.

Prophecy is more valuable than tongues, says Paul, **unless** it is interpreted. Now the spiritual gift of interpretation is not required if anyone present speaks the language in which the tongue is uttered. Otherwise any person who knows the language can interpret the message without the use of a spiritual gift. But apparently Paul expects interpretation using the spiritual gift, which he referred to in 1 Corinthians 12:10, and he has also mentioned the 'tongues of men and angels'. There is no guarantee anyone alive could translate a message given in tongues without the gift of interpretation, as it may have been spoken in a tongue known only to angels.

Was Corinth really composed of countless ethnic groups who could not speak one another's languages? Were worship meetings conducted among people of many human tongues? Was human interpretation necessary just to converse? This would be absurd. There is a reason why the New Testament is written in Greek. At that time, it was to the Roman Empire what English is to the internet today.

For me to visit a Spanish speaking church purely to make someone translate for me would be absurd. For a person who speaks only Spanish to visit an English-speaking church just to make people translate for them, would also be absurd.

But why would God give a message through one person in tongues, requiring someone else to translate it? Why not just give the message to a prophet in his own language?

Many of those reading this will never have seen the above happen. Because and only because the Bible gives no examples of this, we can only understand by seeing it happen ourselves, as I have.

A person amongst the congregation who has the gift of tongues feels led to say something in a non-human tongue, or one they are unfamiliar with. Another person, who has the gift of interpretation, interprets what has been said in order the congregation may understand it.

In the late 1980s I knew someone who gave prophecies in tongues, and I knew several people who interpreted them (I had neither gift). Anyone who feels led to prophesy in tongues should check what the Bible says about doing so. If they give such a prophecy and no-one interprets it, they must not continue. The person who prophesies in tongues does so from the Holy Spirit

with the **emotion** of the Holy Spirit, conveying this to the hearer, because it is the Holy Spirit who does the speaking. The one who prophesies in tongues agrees in their spirit, emotionally, with what the Holy Spirit would say; but God has given the job of delivering the words to someone else.

As a bystander, the impression I had was as follows. The interpreter is perhaps more eloquent, but less in tune with the emotions of the Spirit. The congregation has already experienced the depth of God's emotions through the message in tongues. The interpreter enables others to hear the meaning of the message in a language they understand.

If, after I say this happens, you are unable to see why God would do such a thing, I ask you to remember Paul tells us this happened. It is not our business to tell God what He should do, but to find out why by asking Him, or to accept He does so. If anyone has a better understanding, I am eager to hear it. But not understanding the Word of God does not invalidate the Bible. Rather, if we cannot see why God does a thing, we must accept we do not know, without presuming nobody else does, or supposing our lack of understanding invalidates God's methods.

Having said that, this is what I believe. This situation possibly arises because not everyone who feels what God feels is eloquent, and not everyone who knows what God has to say can say it with feeling. Anyone who has either given a message in tongues or interpreted one knows better than I do, as I have never done either. At this time, I no longer have anyone I can call on for a more experienced opinion.

Having first specified how tongues should be used – in conversation with God, or in prophecy, but only when interpreted - Paul turns to the misuse of these gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:6-9

Now, brothers and sisters, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the pipe or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.

Thus whoever speaks in a tongue should do so in the expectation of being interpreted, or they should not speak at all. Referring again to the 1980s, I have seen the strain on the face of the man called to prophesy in tongues. I remember him speaking of his concern, that he might ever give such a message which was not subsequently interpreted. In fact, that never once happened. But his concern was right and proper. Paul wished everyone in Corinth shared that concern.

1 Corinthians 14:10-12

Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.

Paul continues to point out tongues have a specific place in the life of the body. Being able to speak in them is not the same thing as being called to do so in a congregation. Rather, tongues are **always** a gift enabling one to speak with God (of which more later) and **sometimes** also a gift which can be used to prophesy, **if** an interpreter is present. But using the gift *carelessly* or *selfishly* in a congregation is not a good thing, even though the gift is itself a good thing.

Thus, Paul makes a clear distinction between proper and improper use of tongues. Apparently, the Corinthians had disputes about this or simply needed to be corrected. Paul did not tell them to quit using tongues when they met; he told them **how** and **how not** to use tongues in the body.

1 Corinthians 14:13

For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say.

There is no reason why one person should not interpret their own message, if they have the gift of tongues and of their interpretation. I have never seen this done in a congregation, but I have known it happen in private (of which more later). The division of labour between the mind and the spirit of the believer is a real one, as Paul goes on to explain.

1 Corinthians 14:14-15

For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding.

Paul shows the human mind and the human spirit are two separate things. Both are capable of praising God simultaneously. Therefore, ideally one should use both, not one or the other. Also, one may sing in tongues, not only speak in them, and at the same time praise God in one's thoughts.

To anyone who wonders how this can be done, I would say two things. One, Paul says this is so. Isn't that good enough reason to accept this? And two, the best way to find out what this means is to 'eagerly desire' the spiritual gifts you do not yet have. When you receive them, you will be able to find out what it means to use them through practice. If you want to know what it is like to ride a motorcycle, do you learn better by hearing people talk about it, or by getting on one behind an experienced rider?

If you do not accept what Paul has to say, neither my words nor anyone else's are going to be sufficient to explain. Paul is the only biblical authority on this subject. Which other things Paul said should we ignore because our church does not like them?

1 Corinthians 14:16-17

Otherwise when you are praising God in the Spirit, how can someone else, who is now put in the position of an inquirer, say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since they do not know what you are saying? You are giving thanks well enough, but no one else is edified.

Paul clearly equates praising God 'in the Spirit' with tongues. Otherwise this paragraph means nothing whatsoever. We should remember this elsewhere in the Bible; e.g.

Jude 20

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ...

Less clear references include:

Romans 8:26

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Isaiah 28:11

Very well then, with foreign lips and strange tongues God will speak to this people, ...

And according to Peter's words at Pentecost, this also refers to the phenomenon:

Joel 2:28

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ...

Returning to 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 14:18-19

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

This continues in the same vein. Speaking in tongues without interpretation is fine when you are alone, but in the body, your words must be interpreted, or you should speak in a way others understand.

1 Corinthians 14:20-21

Brothers and sisters, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written: "With other tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord."

Here Paul quotes Isaiah, as I did above. The reason for the difference in wording is Paul chose to quote from the Greek translation of Isaiah in the Septuagint.

1 Corinthians 14:22

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers.

I believe Paul refers here to one-on-one contact. When a believer, B, who is known to an unbeliever, U, suddenly uses a language which U knows B cannot speak, U realises something supernatural is happening. This is because they know what B can and cannot do. But if B says things to U in prophecy, their familiarity actually works against them; as Jesus said, a prophet has no honour in his own country. Often the better you know a person, the less they will listen.

Mark 6:3

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

1 Corinthians 14:23-5

So, if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all, as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

This superficially contradicts the previous verse; but if we look at the context, Paul is now speaking of a group of believers acting together, as opposed to the witness of an individual. If people you do not know speak in tongues, you have no idea whether they are speaking their own language or some other. A group of people all speaking different languages at once appears to be what it is: a futile cacophony. Whereas to be given a word from God by someone who does not know you, showing the speaker has knowledge which can only have come from God, is a witness to God's power. If a friend says you have never got over the loss of your mother and God wants to help you, they are an interfering busybody. If a complete stranger says this, they could not possibly have known this by human means. Thus they have at once gained credence with you which your believing friend could never obtain. This is what Paul describes when he says, *'as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare'*.

So Paul is not contradicting himself, but pointing out an approach which is valuable person to person is not always of value in a group setting, and vice versa.

This is directly applicable to Acts 2, where the believers are gathered together speaking in tongues. At least some of the crowd believed they were drunk. Paul may have had this in mind when he wrote, for he must have been aware of the events at Pentecost, even though he was probably not there himself.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

Here Paul summarises the above. This is the only description of the body at worship in his time. Yet apparently the following things were not known of in the Apostolic era:

- Predetermined service orders.
- A distinction between clergy and laity.
- Extended preaching to the exclusion of other things.
- Rituals of any kind.

Why do we not just behave as Paul describes? Why do we do a thousand other things Paul never knew of?

1 Corinthians 14:37-38 (passing over 34-36)

If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

This reinforces everything said above. No doubt at Corinth some were spiritually gifted, and others simply thought they were. Some who had the gift of tongues had not understood its two purposes; in a congregational setting, it was only to be used for prophecy, and only when interpreted. Any other use should be personal.

Paul says **how** to use the gifts of prophecy, tongues and interpretation in the body. He does not for a moment suggest not doing so – only how and how not to do so.

1 Corinthians 14:39-40

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

This is the ultimate summary of Paul's teaching on the subject. Why does Paul say 'do not forbid speaking in tongues'? Surely life would be easier if they were banned? Surely a ban would eliminate the cacophony which results from their improper use? Yes. It would do both of those things. But it would also deny the Holy Spirit the ability to speak through the whole congregation using a means He has chosen. Who are we to tell the Spirit what to do?

Summary of the evidence so far

E. Evangelism.

The idea tongues were given **only** for evangelism is clearly false. We now know tongues are for conversing with God, for prophecy (if and only if they are interpreted) and can be a sign to unbelievers. Up to this point we have studied every relevant teaching other than Acts 2. For whatever reason, none of the other evidence says anyone thought tongues ever had been, was being or would be used for evangelism. Why is that? Have we really understood Acts 2? Or is there a good reason why Paul does not mention the use of tongues for evangelism? Have we really understood what Luke meant in Acts 2?

F. First evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Paul says some believers have the gift of tongues and others do not. It would be quite incredible for him to say this if every believer had the gift of tongues in his time. We cannot deny tongues were **a** first evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit; but to say they are **the** first evidence is to disregard Paul and Luke on a massive scale.

C. Cessation.

After looking at 1 Corinthians 13, the idea of miraculous gifts ceasing refers to life after the Second Coming, or in heaven. References to false gifts in the future do not ever say real gifts would cease. We must look at contemporary claims for the spiritual gifts, understanding false claims do not preclude real ones.

Mark 3:25

If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

If people come to faith in Christ through a miraculous event, that is not the work of the devil. Conversely if believers are led to false teachings by gifts said to be from God, we must ask: do those performing the miracles preach the same Gospel the Bible shows us, or some other of their own imagination?

The ultimate proof of who a gift user works for, is casting out demons. Some may believe such beings never existed. Others may think they belong to long-gone times. Others may believe any number of false teachings about them. But casting out demons is the only sure sign that a person speaks with the authority of Jesus Christ.

A pastor I know who believes in cessation recounts how he was once in a Hindu temple. There he saw with his own eyes a demon which could not be seen by those gathered to worship idols. The difference between us is this: his response was to leave. I would never have entered. But if I had by some reason ended up inside, it would be the demon which would have left, not me. I would have commanded it to do so, and it would have gone. I say this from experience of casting out demons.

7. Acts 2 without preconceptions.

So far, I have considered the validity of three common beliefs. I have shown none of those ideas are based on evidence from the Bible. Rather, they were developed long after the time of the Apostles and are not derived from their writings in any way. Instead, these things are now clear from Paul's writings:

- Tongues edify the speaker when they are used to communicate with God (alone).
- Tongues should only be used in the congregation if they can be interpreted.
- Paul does not even consider how tongues might be used for evangelism.
- There is no case outside Acts 2 where the gift of tongues is used for evangelism.

Let us therefore reassess Acts 2. There may be other things going on, but all the above must remain true, whatever we think happened on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

When this began, the believers – however many there were - were sitting in a **house**. They were not in the presence of any unbelievers.

Acts 2:5-12

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

After the believers began speaking in tongues, a crowd gathered outside.

Then the believers went outside to evangelize the crowd, for they understood that God had given them the means to do so.

STOP. Not one word of that sentence is in the Bible.

- The Bible does **not** say any believers left the house at this point.
- The Bible does **not** say the believers went out to speak one-on-one with the crowd.
- The Bible does **not** say anyone was saved through anything said in tongues.

But surely that must have happened?

We have absolutely no reason to suppose even one of the above things happened.

Before the crowd comes together, who are the believers speaking to? Who are they evangelising? Nobody. Paul has the explanation. The believers were speaking to God in tongues. Before the crowd arrived, there was no-one to evangelise.

The Bible does not yet tell us any believers went outside. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. The crowd knew those speaking were Galileans, but the house was probably known as their meeting place. Those present had been meeting there since the Resurrection.

Maybe the believers went outside and started addressing people one on one, or maybe they were outside speaking as a group, or maybe they were all still inside making one heck of a noise. Since the Bible does not mention them going outside, we cannot presume they did so.

We may think, 'The believers were evangelising the crowd, so they must have gone outside'. But this assumes they realised their words were evangelical, despite not knowing what they were saying. This also assumes the believers knew there were people outside to be evangelised. What we do know, from Paul's writings, is they could simply be talking to God. I think Paul would have forgiven them all for speaking at once, because none of them knew what was happening; this was a totally new experience. Instead, tongues were a witness to the crowd of God's supernatural power.

The sound was so loud, a crowd gathered. Even from outside, one could tell those inside were speaking real languages some people knew. It must have been one really loud gathering! But before the crowd arrives – which happens AFTER the noise begins and must take time – none of the believers would be aware they were speaking real languages anyone else could understand.

Acts 2:13

Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine."

Do you call that effective evangelism?

So then Peter spoke to the crowd of new believers in many tongues at once, for those there were unable to understand anything said to them unless they heard the language of their home countries.

STOP, STOP. STOP! No part of that sentence is in the Bible!

Acts 2:14-15

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning!

Peter and the other eleven disciples are now outside. Whether there were any other believers present, inside or out, we do not know.

All those present are visiting Jews or people living in Jerusalem, but Peter does not address them as fellow believers in Christ. Not one word suggests the crowd have yet believed anything new, other than God has done a miracle, or, the believers are drunk.

We have no proof anyone outside the house spoke a word in tongues at any time. Even if they did, until now, nothing said has saved anyone. Those present said *'We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!'* ... but they were practising Jews. They were amazed to hear Galileans speak in unexpected languages, but if anything was said in tongues about Jesus, why would Peter need to explain?

Before Peter speaks, the crowd have not been saved. They are a group of people witnessing an event they consider highly out of the ordinary and do not understand.

The hearers say, *'We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!'* – but they do not equate the God of Abraham with Jesus Christ. When they say, *'What does this mean?'*, they are responding exactly as Paul describes:

1 Corinthians 14:23

So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

All the evangelism done that day began with Peter's words. Peter knew those present were puzzled. He was not in the least convinced they were saved. He used the witness of a miracle – speaking in tongues – as the basis for his evangelism. Paul said:

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

So, in Jerusalem, speaking in tongues was a demonstration of the Spirit's power. This is not the only possible kind. But all the evangelism began with Peter's words.

There is no indication Peter spoke to the crowd in tongues. He spoke as he would normally speak. Yet three thousand people were saved. Peter convinced them this was a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy:

Joel 2:28

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ...

How on earth could Peter do that when all those people spoke totally different languages?

Because they also spoke Peter's languages: Aramaic and Greek.

The foreigners present were Jews or Jewish converts. They were familiar with languages spoken in the countries where they lived, but they probably spoke to one another in Aramaic when they met at the synagogue. They all spoke Greek, because they read the Torah in Greek.

That's why the Septuagint was written – the whole world the Jewish diaspora lived in already spoke Greek (not Hebrew).

Why do I suppose Peter could speak Greek? Because every reference to the Old Testament in the New Testament is from the Septuagint, not from texts written in Hebrew. That's why there are wording differences when Jesus quotes the Old Testament; he was quoting the Septuagint. Also, Peter later wrote in Greek. Why should we think he did not know Greek on the Day of Pentecost?

The only languages Peter needed to address the whole crowd were Aramaic and Greek. Why use the gift of tongues to evangelise those present when the believers could use languages everyone present already knew, Greek and Aramaic?

Thus the Bible never suggests tongues were used to evangelise anyone. Paul did not write of using tongues for evangelism, because this had never been done when he wrote to the Corinthians.

After the day of Pentecost, perhaps someone somewhere was saved by an evangelist speaking in tongues. The Bible does not say this could never happen. But when the entire Bible lacks any reference to such an event, why should we say evangelism is what tongues were for, when Paul describes their other uses in detail, yet never mentions using them for evangelism?

Tongues are 'for' what Paul said they were 'for'. They are for communicating with God and for delivering prophecies to the body (if someone present can interpret). Those who claim people have been saved by messages in tongues must explain why this is biblical (though I am not saying it is impossible).

If you can accept tongues were or are used to save people when the Bible makes absolutely no mention of the practice, why do you not also accept they are and were used for the purposes Paul says they were for?

Peter explained the events of Pentecost through Joel:

Acts 2:16-18

No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

*"In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy."*

And they will prophesy.

Peter says speaking in tongues is prophecy – as does Paul. He does not say it is evangelism.

Acts 2:40-41 (passing over 22-39, Peter's evangelical message).

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Whose message? Peter's message. Who was baptised? Those who accepted Peter's message. Who was saved before Peter gave his message? Nobody. The Bible does not tell us of even one.

The Bible does not say tongues were ever used for evangelism in the Apostolic era. They were used for talking to God, alone, and for prophecy.

People fail to realise their own spirit has much to say which their mind knows nothing of; and your spirit is your most direct means of communicating with the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9). But if your spirit had to speak in English, your mind would be tempted to interrupt. Then your spirit would once again be voiceless. This is why God enables your spirit to speak to Him in tongues, whilst your mind speaks to Him in a language you understand.

If your mind knows what to pray, use your own language. If you know prayer is needed and cannot think what to pray, or you cannot express what you feel in words, let your spirit speak to God in tongues.

Imagine for a moment you have landed on a remote island where no-one is saved, and no-one speaks your language. At that moment you receive the gift of tongues. You approach someone and begin to speak in another language. The other person responds with joy. How do you know what you have taught them? How do you know what they need to learn next? You will need the gift of interpretation just to understand their response at all. Without both tongues and interpretation, it would be impossible to evangelise anyone. But there is no reason to suppose it was normal for believers to have both gifts; everything Paul says makes best sense when they had either one, the other, or neither. In that case, you would never even know what you had taught anyone using the gift of tongues. And that is so dangerous a situation for any teacher to be in, I suggest anyone who could use the gift of tongues would have eschewed using them for evangelism.

I have been told of three modern examples where tongues achieved evangelism. In each case a person speaking in tongues for other reasons was overheard by someone passing by who understood. None of these examples took place through a deliberate attempt to evangelise anyone. I suggest it is likely no-one has ever tried to do so, and if they did, it is almost certain they failed. I will now explain why.

8. The scope of first century evangelism.

Many people think tongues were used for evangelism. Those who think so typically believe spiritual gifts ceased when the Apostles died, as the church was then firmly established. But did the Apostles make any converts in regions where tongues were *needed*? If not, why use languages they did not understand to preach to people who already understood them?

In the first century, Judean Jews spoke Aramaic or Greek, common in Judea since the time of Alexander the Great. Even some High Priests took Greek names. Greek was the common language wherever Jews lived. It was harder for Jesus' contemporaries to read scripture in Hebrew than in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament and Apocrypha). When New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament, they quoted the Septuagint; this is why the names of prophets vary between New and Old Testaments in the King James Version. As today in the USA, Hebrew was a language Jews primarily learned for religious reasons.

Israel had a Roman administration, and Latin was common in the regions Paul travelled. Even if Paul, a Roman citizen, did not speak Latin himself, early converts must have included fluent Latin speakers. We also know of Roman converts in Judea prior to Jesus' crucifixion. Thus, the Apostles would have no problem finding helpers who spoke Latin, even if they could not do so themselves.

If the Apostles used tongues for evangelism, believing communities which spoke no Aramaic, Greek, or Latin must have been founded. But there is no evidence any such communities existed in the Apostolic era.

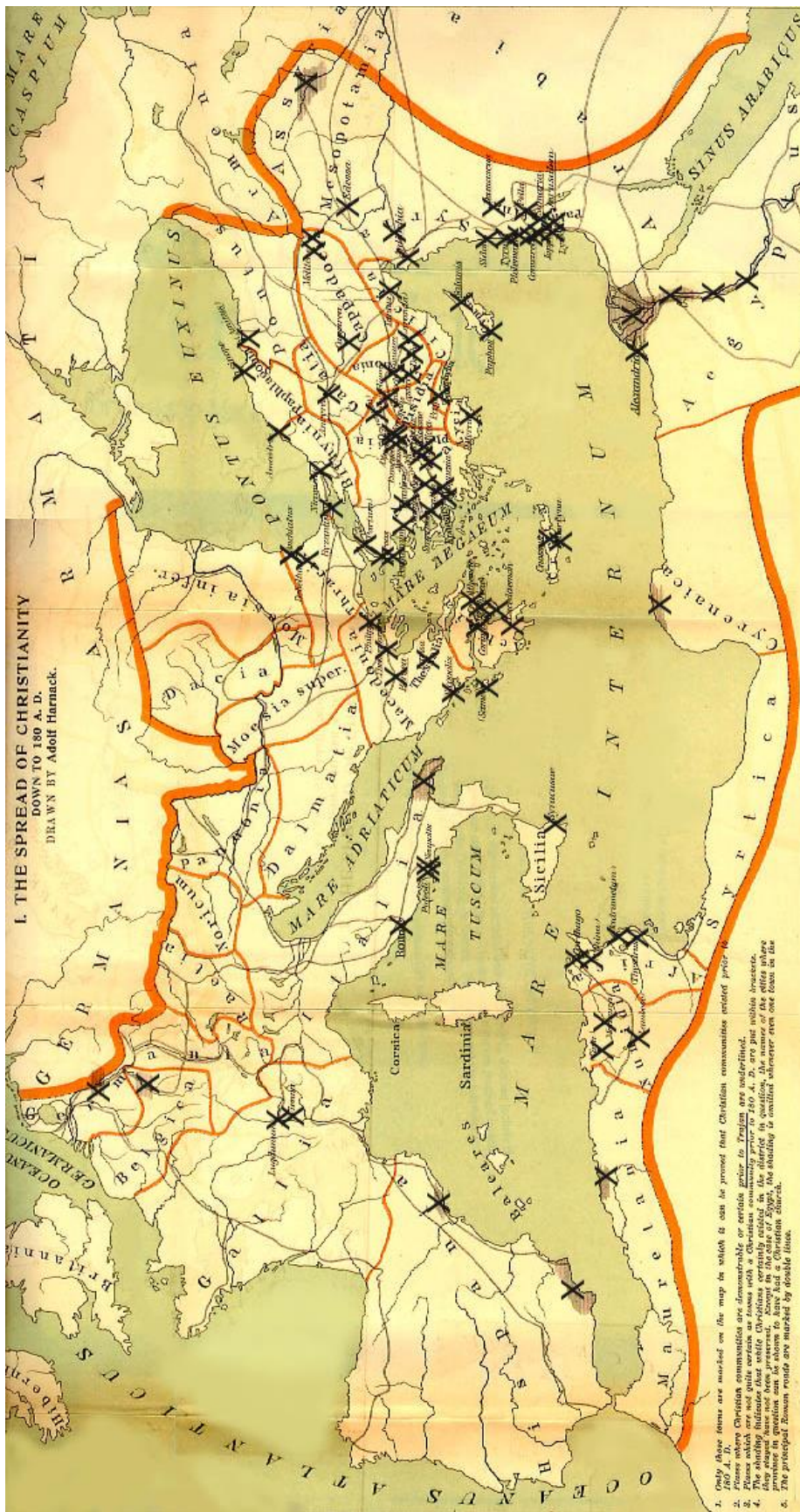
There are many online resources showing the spread of Christianity at various times. For copyright reasons, I can only include public domain maps. The one shown in this chapter was created by Adolf Harnack (d. 1930). City names are unreadable on a page this size, so I have added a large 'X' everywhere a Christian community existed by 180 AD. By then, the Book of Revelation was over 80 years old, and the Apostle John had been dead almost as long. If the gifts of the Spirit died with the Apostles, they were certainly not used in 180 AD.

And yet, as can be seen from the map, a lifetime after the Apostles died, ALL known Christian communities were in the Roman Empire (whose boundaries are shown by the thick line). Other than the addition of Britain, the extent of the Empire changed little since the end of the first century. If any communities unable to speak the languages of the Apostles existed in their time, we have no record of them. Even if some not known to us existed, they were small and rare, and we have no proof tongues, rather than translation, were used to convert them.

It therefore follows:

- The Apostles never *needed* tongues to convert anyone who was saved in their time.
- Converts not speaking Aramaic, Greek or Latin were only saved *after* the Apostolic era.
- Either tongues were not for evangelism, or continued after the Apostolic era ... or both.

It is reasonable to assume tongues were ***never*** used for evangelism in the Apostolic Age, evangelism being solely performed using plain speech. The only reason for supposing otherwise is the belief tongues had no other purpose and must have been used in that way. This is a circular argument, besides being contrary to everything the Bible says. There is far more evidence to show ***the Gospel did not travel further for lack of translators.***



Looking further afield, Greek was sufficient to evangelise anyone in the former Empire of Alexander the Great. His conquests covered a vast area, as shown in the map below. After his death, the descendants of his generals administered Greek-speaking kingdoms. From the west, his former realm extended from modern day Greece through the areas now known as Turkiye, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and beyond, even to parts of northern India.



On the day of Pentecost, we know Jews were living in at least the following locations:

Acts 2:9-11

Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs ...

In short, that means all of Alexander's former empire ... and Arabia as well. All these Jews could converse with the Apostles, and most, if not all, spoke the languages of the countries they lived in. Those who came to faith in Jesus could have helped the Apostles if there was a need for translation, not only in their own area, but over huge realms where their own languages were spoken.

This leaves the question whether tongues were used for evangelism at any time *after* 180 AD. Those who believe the gifts died with the Apostles will say no on principle. But how and where did Christianity expand after that time?

Between 180 AD and 306 AD, the Gospel went East, into Iran, Iraq and Arabia. Alexander's former empire extended through Iran, Iraq, and even into Afghanistan. If you have heard of Kandahar, the name of that Afghan city is derived from 'Iskandahar' – the local name for Alexander the Great. He also invaded parts of India, which is why to this day there are Indians bearing the name 'Sikhander', which means 'Alexander' in their tongue. In Arabia, there were Jews who could have helped spread the Gospel in their local languages, and the languages of Arabia were probably well-known to learned Jewish believers in Israel.

In 306 AD, Constantine became Emperor of Rome. He made Christianity legal throughout his Empire. During his reign, large numbers of pagan Romans adopted Christianity (probably in name only) because the smart thing to do was to copy the Emperor.

Later, the forerunners of the Catholic church did their evangelism in a wholly new way; priests were sent to negotiate with kings, using interpreters where necessary. The 'evangelists' were typically given leave to approve of any pagan practices the populace insisted on retaining. This is how Easter got its name; in Saxon lands, existing spring festivals were named after Eostre, their goddess of fertility. She was in turn an aspect of Ishtar, the goddess of Babylon. Time has changed 'Eostre' into 'Easter'. To Rome, obedience to the Pope mattered more than theology.

Tongues had no part in this purely diplomatic process. When a king converted, he would declare his kingdom Christian. What his subjects actually believed would then change slowly over time.

The growth of Christianity after Constantine became Emperor is the subject of vast amounts of written history. I challenge anyone to find a written account from this era naming any person or group of people converted by the use of tongues.

After the Reformation and before 1904, I have no reason to believe tongues were in *common* use anywhere. Instances have been recorded, but nothing I have read suggests evangelism was associated with tongues in that era.

From the time of Constantine to the beginning of the 20th century, the use of tongues is primarily a mystery. The only people who might possibly have used tongues for evangelism during those long centuries are those who were considered heretics by the dominant churches. Their history was mostly written by those who persecuted them into extinction. Thus what little we know consists of the allegations made against them, whether true or false.

Since 1904 it is possible Pentecostals may have tried using the gift of tongues for evangelism, but I very much doubt it. Whatever others may think of their use of tongues, I do not think Pentecostals have ever thought tongues were useful for evangelism. As I said at the end of the last chapter, I have heard reports of people being saved by *overhearing* others speaking in tongues, when those speaking believed they were conversing with God at the time. But I have never even heard of a person who tried to use tongues for evangelism, or was saved when someone knowingly tried to do so.

In summary:

- In the Apostolic era, no-one or almost no-one got saved outside the Roman Empire.
- Pre-Constantine, almost no-one got saved outside the empires of Rome or Alexander.
- After Constantine, Catholic history shows no use of tongues.

- After the Reformation and before 1904, use of tongues for evangelism is unknown.
- After 1904, tongues have been common, but use for evangelism is not known to me.

In short, it is possible (and in my view almost certain) no-one ever got saved because another person consciously tried using tongues to convert them.

Instead, tongues were used as Paul describes or as happened on the day of Pentecost; to converse with God alone, to be interpreted as a prophecy when speaking in the body, or (rarely) as a witness of God's miraculous power. Even the latter case could readily be taken for drunkenness unless someone was present to explain in the language of the hearer.

According to Wycliffe Bible Translators, there are approximately 1600 languages the Bible has not yet been translated into, whereas the entire Roman Empire could be (and probably was) evangelised using only Greek and Latin. If the gift of tongues was ever intended for evangelism, it would make far more sense for God to confer it on believers today than in the times of the Apostles, who never travelled far enough to need it.

This leaves one question. How did people come to believe tongues were used for evangelism, if they were not? The idea arose long after they ceased to be common in areas controlled by the Catholic church. According to Wikipedia:

1265 – Thomas Aquinas wrote about the gift of tongues in the New Testament, which he understood to be an ability to speak every language, given for the purposes of missionary work. He explained that Christ did not have this gift because his mission was to the Jews, "nor does each one of the faithful now speak save in one tongue"; for "no one speaks in the tongues of all nations, because the Church herself already speaks the languages of all nations". (Summa Theologica, Question 176.)

Aquinas wrote almost a thousand years after tongues were commonly used for any reason. Existing written history did not confirm his account. No living authority on tongues existed to advise him. Everything he said stood in opposition to Paul's writing. To explain why tongues were no longer in use, Aquinas created a theory which fitted his world view. If he had 'eagerly desired' tongues, he might have found out what Paul meant.

After Aquinas' time his ideas were widely repeated. He may have founded (or repeated) a popular view, but it is a groundless one, despite being believed for many centuries.

Having shown tongues were never used for evangelism, we must find out what Paul meant by using them to converse with God. In doing so I must confront other, more recent, misconceptions.

9. Tongues today: real or fake?

The gift of tongues was used for three reasons:

- Personal communication with God.
- Prophecy in the body, when it could be interpreted.
- A sign of God's miraculous power.

As I have shown, Pentecost was not a case of tongues being used for evangelism. There are none recorded and there is no reason to believe there were any such uses in antiquity. I have also shown the Bible does not tell us their use was to cease before we can see Jesus face to face. Maybe tongues ceased, maybe they did not; but examining the verses used to argue tongues have ceased shows the argument is based on non sequiturs and groundless suppositions.

The Bible records three incidents where believers speak in tongues, at least one of which was primarily a sign of God's power; however we have no details of what was said. No cases of interpreting a tongue are recorded, though Paul tells us about this gift. To know more about the gift of tongues, we must examine historical claims or modern usage, then compare them to Paul's writings.

It is almost certain Paul was familiar with fake tongues in his day, as well. According to

<http://www.twoagespilgrims.com/doctrine/pagan-origins-of-modern-speaking-in-tongues/>

'Some of these ecstatic babblings were reported in the "Report of Wenamon" (about 1100 B.C.), Plato's Dialogues (5th century B.C.), and Virgil's Aeneid (1st century B.C.) The Graeco-Roman mystery religions before and after the Christian era most probably practiced these babbling utterances.'

I do not have time to write an account of non-Christian tongues before and after Pentecost, but there are plenty of sources. Paul, a Roman citizen travelling in the Roman Empire, would probably be aware of other religions with superficially similar practices. Thus, 'false tongues' or 'babbling' already existed in Paul's day. There never was an era of 'only real tongues'. Pentecost initiated an era of 'some real tongues'.

The use of false tongues in Paul's day did not invalidate the genuine gift. Accordingly the use of false tongues in our times does not invalidate the real thing, either. Fake tongues have never invalidated real ones.

I do not believe all use of tongues today is genuine. Neither do I think it is all fake. I am certain I have seen both fake and real examples of speaking in tongues. How can we tell the difference between them?

The tongues used on the day of Pentecost were at least in part, and possibly all, real human languages. People overhearing their use from outside the building recognised those they knew. But we cannot make this a test of authenticity, since Paul also refers to 'tongues of angels' (1 Corinthians 13:1). This implies languages not spoken by humans. Paul possibly had in mind a little-known story, the 'Testament of Job', which may have been written before

1 Corinthians. In this story, the daughters of Job were given sashes enabling them to speak and sing in angelic languages. This may or may not be what Paul meant, but the idea of angels having tongues is not unique to Paul.

Paul's advice to the Corinthians tells us when tongues are not being used in a biblical way. Tongues in a public setting must be interpreted. However, we have three incidents where tongues were used by a group when they received the Holy Spirit (Pentecost, Cornelius and the 'disciples' at Ephesus). Paul was present in the final case, yet he did not criticise this. We can also conclude Paul approved of using the gift when it was received (indeed if one does not, how does one know they have received it?)

Every language has its own characteristic set of sounds. Speaking one you do not know requires making sounds you are not familiar with. When a person believes they are speaking in tongues, we should observe whether they are only making sounds common to their own natural language. If so it is reasonable to ask, how can we know they are not simply babbling?

I have only seen one English-speaking group where everyone was expected to speak in tongues as first sign of receiving the Holy Spirit. Nobody I heard was making any sounds which were unfamiliar to the English language, and the utterances were repetitive in nature. Thus I find it reasonable to infer those present were honest fakes. Fakes, because this was not real speaking in tongues; honest, because they genuinely believed they were. When you tell people they have not received the Holy Spirit until they speak in tongues (which I have shown is not true), you are giving them a strong reason to babble. In a church which makes this a doctrine, everyone who does not receive the gift will babble, but this is neither a language, nor communication with God.

The gift of tongues is a gift, not an automatic right. Paul clearly says some have the gift of tongues and others do not. So, paradoxically, when everyone in a group claims to have the gift of tongues, quite possibly none of them have it! Once deceived into thinking you already have the gift, you are not going to 'eagerly desire' it. I cannot see how you will ever get the real gift of tongues if you already practise babbling.

Thus there are two major hindrances to receiving a genuine gift of tongues today:

- 1) Preaching cessation, because no-one 'eagerly desires' what they believe they can never get.
- 2) Preaching tongues as **the** first evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit. This places a strong pressure on new believers to babble. Once they begin babbling, they will not 'eagerly desire' what they think they already have.

My reasoning might be summarised as "a plague o' both your houses" (Shakespeare, *'Romeo and Juliet'*), but there is instead a 'most excellent way'.

We should follow Paul and 'eagerly desire' the gift of tongues. This is all the advice the Bible gives on receiving any spiritual gift. What more could we do? It is then the job of the Holy Spirit to prepare us for the gift, give the gift and teach us how to use it. Desire is the one thing asked of us. But what does desire mean? If we desire a gift, surely we will see the need to study what the Bible says about it, talk to those who have the gift, and learn from all the sources we can. If we do not do such things, how can we be said to desire? Yet in the end,

the Holy Spirit is the only giver. Merit is not required and could never be achieved; desire is His only requirement.

If you are in a congregation where you can see the gifts in regular use, it is easy to learn from others how to ask for and receive the spiritual gifts. In England in the 1980s I knew many such congregations. Today I know only one. A generation is growing up not knowing what their parents did, because their parents have ceased even speaking of such things.

To those who are not in such a congregation, the best answer remains Paul's advice: *eagerly desire* the spiritual gifts. They will be harder to experience alone than in a body already using them, where you can be taught and encouraged, but God will get you there. Pray for understanding, and it will be given. Above all, the spiritual gifts were meant to be used. It is primarily through using them that you will come to understand them.

Having studied the spiritual gifts, we should seek them the same way we seek anything from God; ask.

Matthew 7:7-11

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Asking means we may be answered yes, no, or wait. It does not mean we can demand immediate results. Nobody would say they receive all they ask God for immediately, or ever. Why, in this regard, should the spiritual gifts be different from anything else God gives? Though the spiritual gifts are always good, the individual believer may not be ready for the gift. Also, we must have the right motives.

Acts 8:18-23 ('Simon' here is 'Simon the Sorcerer', not 'Simon Peter')

When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

What are the right motives? Paul tells us love is more important than the gifts, and the gifts are given for the common good:

1 Corinthians 12:7

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

We are surely more likely to receive spiritual gifts if we seek to serve the body from love. Tongues is a unique exception:

1 Corinthians 14:4

Anyone who speaks in a tongue edifies themselves, ...

Thus, the gift of (speaking in) tongues can be given to a person purely for their own good. That is why it is relatively easy to get; you can only misuse a genuine gift of tongues by using it in the wrong setting. Paul said:

1 Corinthians 14:18

I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you.

We may reasonably conclude Paul edified himself a great deal by speaking in tongues. Was it by doing so he became the greatest teacher of the Apostolic Age?

This brings us to the real proof of a genuine gift of tongues. What are its fruits?

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

If a person is truly speaking in tongues, rather than babbling, we should expect these fruits to be more apparent in their lives as time goes by. Babbling will not get the same results.

1 Corinthians 14:2

For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. ...

Speaking in tongues is prayer. Therefore, we should expect to see a response from God. Yet how can we know whether prayers have been answered when we do not know what was said? Everyone I know who has spoken in a genuine tongue has asked themselves this question.

The best explanation is to give examples. Since the Bible lacks examples, we must seek modern ones. As you read through the examples I give, ask yourself, do you believe – without assuming the result in advance – these examples are of God, or the devil, or just the human mind working overtime?

10. Tongues for individuals.

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

1 Corinthians 14:2

For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit.

The key to the whole experience of using tongues alone, is this. We do not always know what is best to pray. It is through our minds we understand the world (as best we can) and make decisions. But our minds do not always know what is best to do or to pray for; surely all believers have been in doubt at times?

When we do not know what to pray, the gift of tongues enables the Holy Spirit to intercede for us, praying through our own spirit in ways our own spirit would agree with.

This may seem weird to those who have no clear experience of their own spirit. However, the reason they have no experience of their own spirit, if they are a believer, is their church has taught them to disregard it. A believer having no understanding of their own individual spirit would be hard for Paul to conceive of, yet the church has managed to accomplish this by teaching cessation and a materialist world view, neither of which come from the Bible.

John 3:5-7

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

Hebrews 12:9

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!

God is the Father of our spirits, and it is our spirits which are born again when we are saved - *'the Spirit gives birth to **spirit**'* - not our minds or our bodies. Our human fathers and mothers caused our bodies to be born and our minds come with our bodies; but our spirit comes from God alone, and it is our spirits which are born again. This results in the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2) but the mind does not renew itself. That is a process; it is not over the day you are saved. What happens the day you are saved, is your spirit is born again.

Your body and your mind are born once. Neither of them is born again the day you are saved. That would require a physical rebirth.

Have you seen people walk away from an evangelical event which excited them, only to become confused by the time they reach the car park? When they begin to wonder what their choices really meant, this is because they have not experienced the rebirth of their spirit; only their mind has been affected. A lot of evangelism looks very effective in the church or arena, but has become an illusion by the time the crowd gets home.

Almost all the public evangelism I have seen concentrates on intellectual belief, never reaching to the spirits of those being evangelised. Lacking any experience of what they now believe, then failing to find it in the empty ceremonies performed in most churches, the newly evangelised are confused. They often end up feeling further from God in their spirit after their mind has been convinced by a purely intellectual argument.

Yesterday they did not believe in God. Today they do, but they have no experience of Him and no idea how they might begin to experience Him. This is a loneliness for which the only solution is an encounter with God; and it is in that encounter that the spirit is reborn, whether it takes a form that is readily described, or not.

There is no surer way to discover what it means for your spirit to be born again than to use the gift of tongues. When you have this gift, your spirit will always have a way to communicate with the Father. Without that gift, your spirit is in all likelihood just sitting there doing nothing and being mistaken for some aspect of your mind ... which it is not.

When we do not know what to pray, the gift of tongues enables us to pray. We trust the Holy Spirit to guide our own spirit into praying the very best prayer that could be made. Then and only then will we find out what the gift is for in a personal situation.

- You cannot have a genuine gift of tongues without having first been born again.
- You can be born again without having the gift of tongues.
- You can be born again and be led into babbling (making a noise with no meaning).
- You can receive the gift of tongues the moment you are saved, but today this is rare.

Teaching cessation or 'first evidence' can both prevent receiving the gift. Replace those teachings with sound theology, and receiving tongues the moment you are born again might be common today, as it was in Paul's time. But one must also consider the effect of contemporary world views which deny the supernatural.

Now we have considered everything the Bible says about tongues and all the consequences of modern teachings, I will tell you about my own experiences. As tongues were intended to be used in private, I cannot tell you about the experiences of others!

I had been saved for about nine months before I considered 'baptism in the Spirit'. I had heard this was commonly associated with speaking in tongues but was not one and the same thing. I became convinced God wanted me to pray for this baptism and then ask for it at a specific place and time, so I studied everything the Bible said about 'baptism in the Spirit', and prayed.

On the day, I went to the service I felt led to visit. My friends prayed for me to receive baptism in the Spirit (**not** the gift of tongues). Then they asked me if I was disappointed that nothing appeared to have happened.

I was not; I knew I had done what God wanted me to do and that He would do what He intended to do, whether or not I could feel it.

At that time, I shared a house with an unbelieving friend. After I had driven everyone else home, I found him in turmoil. I began to talk to him about Christ (not for the first time), but as I did so, I found I could now pray in English in what I thought was my mind, whilst simultaneously speaking to my friend in English.

Today I would say my spirit was doing the praying – in English - and that is why I was able to do something I could not have done before. But this was not apparent to me at the time. As a result, my friend, who was considered the most stubborn atheist in existence by all our mutual Christian friends, was saved that night. He has continued in the faith to this day, thirty-five years later.

Seeing him in a church the next day was very hard for our friends to believe. One was unable to see him by my side as she talked to me. She was convinced he simply could not be there. The sight of her walking away, only to come to a halt, turn round and literally stare at the sight of the new convert, remains clear in my memory to this day.

That was not the gift of tongues as described in the Bible, and I was very aware of that. The teaching given at the church where I was saved said the vast majority of those who asked for the gift eventually received it. Surrounded as I was by a congregation of doctors, university lecturers, university students and other serious-minded people, I saw no reason to think they were fooling themselves. I continued to pray for the gift, but I did not receive it.

On one occasion I was being prayed for by a young woman in the congregation. I told her of my struggles with receiving the gift of tongues. Her reply was, now I had asked for it, all I had to do was open my mouth and speak. But that troubled me so much I could not bring myself to do so. Could the gift really work in such a way?

Later I was standing in the congregation next to a doctor I knew. He was singing in tongues whilst the rest of the congregation were singing songs and hymns. When we sat down, I remarked on the beauty of his voice. He told me he would not normally sing in tongues in a congregational setting, but today he had laryngitis and was unable to praise God any other way. His illness could be heard when he spoke. I have no reason to doubt his medical opinion.

Was God glad the doctor had praised Him in tongues when he could not do so in English? I think so. When singing in tongues, the doctor sounded like a descant boy chorister, not a man unable to speak properly by reason of illness.

Time went by. I was no nearer to receiving the gift of tongues. I studied my Bible fervently and prayed a great deal. I probably more often knew what to pray, and more often got remarkable answers to prayer, than anyone else I knew. But then came a day when I had no idea what to pray.

I had lived a lonely life with little experience of women. Most of the experience I had was bad. At the start of the year I asked God to provide me with a girlfriend by the end of it. In December she had arrived (I shall refer to her as 'Zena' for clarity, though that was not her name). Nevertheless, we had a misunderstanding. A few months later she was angry with me, but I had absolutely no idea why. It looked like this relationship was falling apart. I was desperate this would not happen. I was finally unable to work out what to pray, yet desperate to do so. At last I told the Father I was going to open my mouth and let Him put words into it, because I had no idea what to pray. I badly needed His help.

Listening to myself pray in tongues for the first time was a difficult experience. The prayer seemed to come to a natural end, so then I earnestly prayed in English; how could I ever know if my prayer had been answered unless I knew what it was?

To my immense surprise, I began to speak in English. This was not my mind speaking; I was interpreting my own tongue. I heard myself speak out a prayer I could never have thought of. I do not remember the exact words, but the principles were as follows:

Heavenly Father, you have made me responsible for this relationship and it is failing. I do not know what I have done wrong, but I repent of whatever it is. I am sorry for failing to fulfil my responsibilities and I ask your forgiveness. Please now empower me to do whatever it is you require of me, and restore my authority, in Jesus' name.

I had not realised no matter who did what, I was **responsible** for this relationship. Even if Zena had done all the wrong things and I had done none, I had to accept responsibility. If I did so, then I would have power from God to make things right. I only learned this from hearing myself say so! Whether you like the theology or not, this absolutely worked.

The following day, I met Zena. It was as though nothing had ever been wrong between us. Not only that, but until the day she gave up following God, the same prayer, spoken in English, invariably solved any and every problem which stood between us.

Returning to that day, I was sitting on a grassy hill with Zena, telling her about this. She had been speaking in tongues for years, and as I tried to repeat the experience, she found my struggles hilarious. I came to realise the only problem with receiving the gift had been my own incredulity. Could it really be this simple? So I would not try. And yet at the same time, I am glad I deferred trying until I did. By doing so I received a deeper understanding of the gift. If I had opened my mouth and run the risk of babbling, would I have known whether I was getting results? Instead, I was now clear tongues have a purpose, and are ideal when you do not know what to pray in English. Make a noise for the sake of making a noise, and that may be all you are doing.

The above is the only time I have interpreted a tongue spoken by anyone. I have not sought the gift of interpretation, because it is normally used in the body. The bodies I have been in have either had plenty of interpreters or did not allow speaking in tongues. So there was no cause for me to seek a gift I would not be using. But speaking in tongues has, ever since then, been my first resort as soon as I do not know what to pray in English. (I do not consider myself to have the gift of interpretation; I consider myself to have experienced an *instance* of the gift. Having the gift means being able to use it permanently).

One of the things Zena taught me about speaking in tongues, was if you use them regularly, you will stop having headaches. I can confirm this. Whenever I had a headache, I would pray in tongues. After a very few more, I have not had a headache in 33 years, except due to an allergic reaction to artificial cherry flavouring. Whatever causes headaches, prayer in tongues not only stopped the ones I had, but within a few months, it prevented me from ever having one again.

Surely the Holy Spirit knows what the best prayer to cure a headache is? Now you might think it would be better if the Spirit told me what that prayer was, so I could tell you – but whatever causes your headaches may not be what formerly caused mine. So instead, I suggest you pray for the gift of tongues, then let the Spirit guide you into praying whatever heals your headaches or any other problems you may have. That is more likely to be effective!

The very nature of speaking in tongues means unless they are interpreted, as above, you cannot be sure what has been prayed. But if you use tongues when you do not know what to pray, you begin to see patterns emerge which you cannot deny.

My nephew became a born-again believer at the age of eleven. I was at that time almost his only spiritual adviser, as we lived in the English countryside surrounded by dead churches. When he was twelve, an incident caused his mother to threaten to stop me seeing him. At that time my sister professed no faith, and argument would not help. So my response was to spend about an hour praying in tongues. The next day, it was as if there had never been a problem.

My nephew was a very prayerful young man. His intellect and interests were way ahead of his age. That made him very lonely, so he devoured his Bible and spent his time praying. One day he told me he had been praying about a situation and could not think what to say; then he had begun to voice 'funny sounding words'. So he asked me if this was all right. I had never mentioned the subject of tongues to him. I am as certain as I can be that nobody else had done so either. I asked him whether the words were repetitive, whether they made him feel 'weird' in any way, and other such common-sense questions. When the answers gave me no reason for concern, I explained he had been given the gift of tongues and should use it in private whenever he felt the need. He has subsequently lived the most purposeful and devoted Christian life of anyone I can name.

One might ask how you can 'eagerly desire' something when you do not know it exists. I think my nephew eagerly desired to be able to pray about a subject, and God answered him with the gift which would enable that.

Later I was divorced by my first wife – Zena, the girlfriend I referred to above. We had two children. I would drive 100 miles round trip to collect them, so they could stay the weekend with me. My ex-wife would do everything she could to make things difficult for me and for them. When I came to expect this, I began spending the drive to her house speaking in tongues. When I remembered to do this, my ex-wife, who was unaware, mysteriously stopped making trouble. I thus became increasingly open to speaking in tongues as a pre-emptive measure.

In 2005, after my divorce, I visited the USA to meet a female friend. One day she left me in charge of her trailer whilst she went looking for her wayward daughters. After she left, the

screen door and the trailer door were opened by a young woman I knew to be a friend of the missing girls. She came in, walked towards me, and was six inches in front of me when she turned left, towards the far end of the trailer, the site of daughter No. 2's bedroom. She had not asked whether she could come in, nor said where she was going, nor asked me to step aside rather than almost collide with me. This was a level of arrogance which would irk most people. I burst into tongues in fury. Her back disappeared from my sight. I searched the trailer from end to end and found no-one. Then I knew what she really was.

My friend had told me she often slept on the sofa by the door to wait for her daughters to come home. She did not trust them to have their own key, fearing they would give it to someone else. On several occasions she had been woken at night by the door slamming as someone had gone out. She was concerned someone was getting into the trailer whilst she was asleep, and she was only hearing them when they went out.

I told her the entire situation was the work of what is commonly called a poltergeist. That is a name given to a spirit which moves things but usually goes unseen. Such a being is just another evil spirit which acts in that particular way, not different in nature from any other evil spirit. A man who sells you insurance and a man who runs a church are both men; they just take part in different activities. The key point was, this would not be happening again. When I saw it, it appeared to me as a girl I knew, so it was only its rudeness that led me to pray. When I prayed, I thought I was angry about the young woman's attitude, so saying anything in English would just result in a row. Instead, the fury was that of the Holy Spirit, and what I must have prayed was "GET OUT IN JESUS' NAME!" Until I actually did so in tongues and saw what happened, I would never have thought to do so in English.

The trailer door never opened or closed itself again.

Before this happened, I would have said these things were impossible. But through this experience, I was given a much clearer insight into the actions of (non-human) spirits. Since then, I have been confident about dealing with such instances for other people whenever there has been a need to do so.

During three decades of belief, I have met other people whose accounts of the gift of tongues stand comparison with the above. I have also three times heard of tongues being used for evangelism in the modern day. I have no reason to doubt any of those stories. However the Christian world has too many people in it who uncritically report the tales of others. This has brought the faith into disrepute. For that reason, I will let others tell their own tales, *except* where refusing to repeat theirs would deprive readers of a proper explanation. Therefore, I will say the following things as my observations, and claim no more for them than that.

There is more need for tongues to enable evangelism now than at any time in the Apostolic era or since. I find contemporary claims of tongues being used for evangelism possible, but very rare indeed. I have no direct experience of this at all; only witness accounts. However even if this is so, which I cannot personally verify, the idea that tongues were given solely for evangelism is totally opposed to everything Paul wrote.

Tongues are the 'Swiss army knife' of the spiritual gifts. They have an answer for every situation if you cannot think what to pray, or even do not know that a prayer is needed. The

only regret I have in using the gift for 33 years is I wish I could say with Paul "*I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you*". But I cannot.

Thirty years ago, I was only one of very many people in the English revival who understood these things, and I was the least of them. Mysteriously the countless people who were using the spiritual gifts at that time, tongues or otherwise, appear to have gone silent, and now live their lives without anyone knowing what they used to do. To see why that is, in the case of those I know best, carry on reading.

1 Corinthians 14:39

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

11. Tongues in the body.

I have never given a message in tongues, nor interpreted one, in a congregational setting; but I have witnessed both happening on many occasions. I shall begin with a brief explanation why prophecy in a church setting matters.

Back in 1989, my part in Sunday worship was to man the overhead projector (remember them? They have been replaced by computer projection now). This gave me a slightly elevated seat at the front of the building. I could look out on the congregation much as a minister can, but from a nice safe corner no-one was looking at. From there I could see everything, and when the minister encouraged the congregation to speak, I excitedly waited to see the Spirit pick out one or another. Then I would ask myself, is this for me? I would then act on whatever I felt had been spoken for my ears, and in the coming week, I would see miracles.

As an example, I had spent a lot of time talking about Jesus to one of the most difficult women you could ever imagine. Then one Sunday there was a prophecy of a 'harvest of souls' in the coming week. I was sure this related to her. I went home and refused to pray until Monday night, when I was sure I had the right prayer. On Tuesday evening she was saved in one of the most startling and exact answers to prayer I have ever seen or heard of. I am in no doubt the prophecy on Sunday played a huge part in her salvation; and for all I know it may have resulted in plenty of other cases that week. It is through prophecy that the Holy Spirit shows us what to do, and how. Without it, we are like an army without radar, drones or satellites; we shoot at what we cannot see and we miss what we ought to be hitting.

Speaking in tongues is, for whatever reason the Holy Spirit chooses to do so, a major method through which prophecy is or can be made. Paul describes how prophecy is a part of Christian gatherings:

1 Corinthians 14:29-32

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

How many churches now have two or three prophets speaking in turn, with or without the use of tongues? I have seen this done and I have seen the results. Paul did not envisage meetings without prophecy, but he never describes a sermon as we know it, nor a single person directing who does what and when. Paul believed this was the job of the Holy Spirit.

Later that year, I was at the centre of a group of people who together experienced a major tragedy; the Spirit left our church. When I say I was 'at the centre', that was true, because I probably knew more of the people involved on a close personal level than anyone else did. But I was the least important person present. I had no part in the above, other than to observe.

From that day to this, I have believed I was put there to observe and in time to understand. Understanding took many years and has been one of the saddest things in my life. I look back on everyone involved with respect and love; but not without assigning responsibility in my

mind, because it is vital the body should understand how a church can, in one week, go from being a powerhouse of praise to a morgue, even though all the same people are still present.

This was not because of a fault with prophecy or interpretation. It was because they were forbidden 'for a season'.

Some may say 'the Spirit is present everywhere'. There is no question that in some sense, God is omnipresent throughout the universe. However, if one uses this to say the Glory of the Lord is the same thing as His omnipresence, and the Glory of the Lord cannot be more present or less present at any time and place, one is denying the Bible. You cannot do so without making at least four Bible references meaningless:

At the dedication of Solomon's temple:

1 Kings 8:10-11

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

The presence of God was especially real at the dedication of Solomon's temple, or there would be nothing special to report. Yet many years later, Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord depart from the same temple:

Ezekiel 10:18-19

Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the LORD's house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

The presence of God was especially *absent* from the temple in Ezekiel's time, or we directly contradict him. Our Lord promised:

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.

The Lord has promised to be especially with us wherever two or three gather in His name. Unless He is more present when two or three gather in His name than He is when a person is alone, this quotation means nothing.

Some may be surprised the following verse is listed with the others:

Revelation 3:20

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

Despite saying He will be with us when two or more gather in His name, Jesus represents Himself as **outside** the door of the church at Laodicea, for the messages in Revelation are addressed to the angels of the churches, not to individuals. Any Protestant theologian will tell you Laodicea represents the church of our time, though they may not agree with me on other

points. At Laodicea, Christ is outside the door. Thus, we have reason to believe the Lord is outside the door of most churches today.

Both in the New and Old Testaments, God has shown us His presence can be more or less especially evident at one time or another. In respect of Ezekiel's vision, we can see many reasons why the Lord departed from the Temple. One need only read the prophets to see the catalogue of evil which led to this, and to the exile in Babylon which followed.

Theologians as far back as Luther have contended the church can also be in Babylonian captivity as a *spiritual* experience. Luther saw this was the case for the Catholic church in his day. Yet if the church is in Babylon, how can the Spirit still be within the church? Ezekiel saw the Spirit depart from the Temple *before* the Babylonian captivity. If the church is in Babylon, the Spirit is not, and must have departed already.

We may think the church we are in simply cannot be that bad. I sincerely hope yours is not. But we are then in danger of earning the same rebuke which was given to those who said:

Jeremiah 7:4

... *"This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"*

To those people in Jerusalem, God gave a warning; their false religion was worthless. He threatened to do to them what he had already done to their brothers and neighbours Israel; and in time, He did.

Now it would be very hard for the church to be as bad today as the Judeans were in Jeremiah's time – wouldn't it? Every believer will have their own prejudices. They may disagree about what is wrong with society and what is wrong with the current state of Christianity. But surely any believer can see both church and state are now in a terrible condition?

Who should we blame for this? Ourselves. God gave us Almighty power to use through His gifts, yet we have refused to use it. We have a responsibility to change the world through our prayers and through our witness. Do we bear no responsibility for our failure? Is our ineffectiveness a reason for complacency, or repentance?

We have failed to change the world because we are ineffectual, and we are ineffectual because we ignore the supernatural abilities God offers us. We haven't changed the world because we won't do it the way God said to. What kind of excuse is that?

If you experience the presence of God in your church, nothing else on earth can or will be so dear to any who can share it. If you have ever known His presence, and are not experiencing it today, you will be well aware this is so. But for those who have never known such a thing, how could God's presence be recognised?

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Luke 1:39-45

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 24:30-32 (on the road to Emmaus)

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

The hallmark of the presence of God is fullness of joy.

You may think your church is a pleasant place to be, but in the presence of God you will know fullness of joy; no less.

There is another point; why could the priests not enter the Temple of Solomon at its dedication? Why was it too full?

I believe this to be prophetic. If you act like a priest and stand between God and the people (which is the job of a priest) then the very nature of your job will inoculate you against the power and the presence of God, which in the New Testament church is made manifest ***through the body.***

Paul warned us all:

1 Corinthians 14:39

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

I shall continue by explaining how great a price you can pay for defying this one verse of scripture.

When I entered a church in 1987, I was intent on killing a man. I only entered because I wanted to give God one last chance to make Himself real to me before I did so. I expected I would then live the rest of an empty life in prison, staring at the walls in brokenness, bereft of purpose.

God made Himself known to me that day, and everything rapidly changed. The man I intended to kill has been my good friend for thirty-six years since then. I can disagree with him, but how can I be angry? I gave up killing him for Jesus' sake. So the most I can do is laugh.

That is how very special being there was at that time. It was not anything preached, sung, or even said to me in witness that changed my heart. Jesus became real to me there that day, and He is my Lord. I went home and told Him instead of all the things I had been doing or had wanted to do, I wanted to worship Him instead.

Psalm 32:5

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."

And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

I am almost in tears to think of this after 36 years. But what has this to do with prophecy or with interpretation of tongues?

Fast forward to when I first had a part in running the service, about 18 months later, manning the overhead projector. I remember being given the service sheet, on which amongst many other things were written these three mysterious letters:

PSH

I went over to the worship team (how I miss them!) and asked what a 'PSH' was. They told me it was a 'Planned Spontaneous Happening'. Now wherever do you get an idea like that from? They explained it was a point in the service at which the Lord might be likely to involve Himself.

"In that case, why do we have the rest of the service?" I asked.

I am still asking that today. But now I am a lot clearer about the issues.

Years before, one of the curates felt challenged by the Lord to preach about the presence of God in worship **until it happened**. I remember hearing him tell about this long after he had obeyed and the presence had come. After one of his sermons on this topic, he was asked by a visitor how this could be brought about. The curate was surprised to hear himself answer, "Do you give God time?"

We can either decide what we are going to do all Sunday and do it, in which case God will let us get on with our own ideas, or we can decide to let God have a chance to involve Himself. If so, we must be prepared to allot Him time to do so. Putting 'PSH' on the service sheet was effectively a written invitation for the Spirit to show up. And He came. When He comes, for a little while, you have the fullness of joy the Bible speaks of. Not because of anything anyone does or anything you can measure; it is Him, filling every part of you with joy.

The church services most people are familiar with are set in stone. If the service order is a stone, then the PSH was a crack which the Spirit could get into. Whenever given the opportunity, God filled such cracks. Then He began to gently squeeze them apart and put a little more into them through the body – not the worship team, or the minister – until the presence of God in that place was enough to make someone intent on murder walk in and get saved. I know, I did so.

The Lord began to widen those cracks and take more of a part in the service through a friend of mine, who I understand far better now than I did when he was alive. He was an old Irishman from Dublin who had been raised Catholic. He had been an alcoholic, but following his divorce, he was saved, became sober, and began speaking in tongues and delivering people.

Just before the following events, the young woman I was later to marry left England to spend the summer in Vermont. She had absolutely no knowledge of what followed until she returned.

That summer, God called my Irish friend to give prophecies in tongues. He was very anxious about this, because he quite rightly believed if anything he said was not interpreted, he should desist. But as the weeks went by, one prophecy in tongues after another was interpreted.

It is only because we shared a fellowship group that I knew my Irish friend came under pressure to join the worship team; not as a singer, but purely as a prophet. However, he was very clear the Spirit told him to prophesy in tongues **from the body**. 1 Corinthians 14 shows us he was right:

1 Corinthians 14:29-32

Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.

Now this all went fine as far as anyone else could see. The pressures on my friend were not discussed anywhere else to my knowledge. But finally, after several weeks, something cracked.

I well remember my friend prophesying in tongues. I remember as soon as he finished speaking, an old former clergyman spoke what he believed to be the interpretation. I was very clear it was not. This was not a serious problem. In my view, he uttered a perfectly sound but lacklustre prayer which was not the interpretation.

Then one of the worship leaders spoke. I shall never forget how she started or finished, though the middle I no longer remember. I was in no doubt her words were the interpretation. The conclusion still sizzles in my mind to this day. "Feel the weight of the sword [of the Spirit] in your hand!"

After she had interpreted, I could see no problem at all. I also saw myself as the least of the congregation, surrounded by others who knew better. I knew and loved all three of those who had spoken. Though two of them are probably long dead, and the other is far away, I still do.

At some point in the next week, we heard the ministers had made a decision (not the old, retired minister who had given the supposed interpretation). They had decided prophecy in tongues and speaking in tongues were to be disallowed 'for a season'.

Well, that was 34 years ago.

Afterwards, my Irish friend continued coming. He obeyed the ministers' decision for several weeks – but the Spirit continued to tell him to prophesy in tongues. After a few weeks, he could no longer stand the conflict, and had to obey the Lord. So, he left and went to another church where he was free to do as the Lord told Him.

Ezekiel 10:18

Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple ...

The Holy Spirit left my church that day. People who have never known what it was like to be there 'before' may find that a strange comment, having only known life in churches where an experience of the presence of the Spirit is a thing of the past or has never been known. But when my future wife came back from Vermont the next week, she could not be consoled, because it was completely obvious to her, without anyone saying what had happened in her absence, that the Spirit of the Lord had left the church she loved.

The Spirit had gone with my Irish friend to the church he left us for, where he was able to carry on doing as the Lord told him. At this time, I have no knowledge of how long that continued.

Now everyone else seemed to know the Spirit had left, except the ministers.

1 Kings 8:10-11

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

After my friend left, the 'priests' could 'perform their service' just how they wanted. But they could not make God turn up. A church which had been growing without even trying to do so, which had enlarged the building to cope with the growth, which then had to create four separate services on a Sunday, each for a different set of people, so everyone could get in once a week, stopped growing. No-one felt led to come forward for prayer. Miracles ceased. Worship was no more special than it was anywhere else; less so, in that one knew there could be so much more.

1 Corinthians 14:39

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

Do not convince yourself doing so 'for a season' is anything but a rebuke to the Holy Spirit.

Why is this matter so very important to God?

Because what Paul knew and described at Corinth was what God always wanted. The meeting proceeded from the body, with the Spirit speaking in some way or another through anyone and everyone as He saw fit, making the least valued members of society just as important as those who had worldly status:

1 Corinthians 14:26-28

*What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, **each of you** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.*

Whilst a church is heading that way – a spontaneous act of worship led solely by the Spirit – the Spirit will gently guide them further in that direction. He considers each of our meetings to be something He wants to organise, using whoever He wishes in whatever order He wishes, for the good of all. This is what the ‘priesthood of all believers’ means in practice.

But if a congregation refuses to be led by the Spirit and wants to have empty religiosity instead, the Spirit will leave. The people least able to tell the difference will be professional ministers. Why is this? Because they play a role known neither to the Corinthians nor to the Holy Spirit. Why have we based the entire content of our meetings on the decisions of human ministers, when everything we know about New Testament worship says the Holy Spirit led through whoever He chose, one after another?

I have not named the ministers responsible for those decisions, because I love them too. As far as human ministers can be, they were very good ones. I cannot say I knew better than them at the time, because I did not. I had only been saved two years and had no idea what should have been done, though it was clear things had gone seriously wrong. Yet the ‘season’ for which they barred speaking in tongues resulted in the Spirit being absent for at least sixteen years, when I last visited the building the church relocated to. Then I was shown the truth of the matter; but that is best referred to in a separate work about the gift of prophecy.

So what happened? Did lightning bolts fall? Were people struck dead? Of course not. We were struck *spiritually* dead.

1 Chronicles 13:7-10

They moved the ark of God from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio guiding it. David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, timbrels, cymbals and trumpets. When they came to the threshing floor of Kidon, Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the ark, because the oxen stumbled. The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God.

Was God right to kill Uzzah? Uzzah touched what should not be touched, and in a religion of law and ceremony, that was what it cost him. But when we deny the Spirit the right to speak through whom He chooses and when, shall we escape a consequence? We have been struck spiritually dead by the departure of the Spirit, who alone should decide who speaks and when. Everything else is a form of public entertainment for people who like religiosity. But God is not entertained by it at all.

That is the cost of refusing to allow prophecy in tongues or speaking in tongues; the spiritual death of the church. Only those with religious hearts, above all ministers, will be unable to tell everything worthwhile has ended.

I shall give the last word to Mary of Magdala:

John 20:11-13

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him."

And that is how I feel, to this day.

Most of you will never have known that presence and will thus not have known such a loss. I can walk into any church I want to and find people I can agree with. I can find places where I can sing songs I like to sing. But there is no replacement for the presence of the Living God. That presence awaits you if you will adopt the practices of the church Paul described at Corinth. Just make sure everyone knows they should only speak in tongues if they will be interpreted. That's all God ever wanted. His presence is all I have wanted from the day I ceased trying to kill a man, and instead embraced the God who was killed by my sins. The only reason your church lacks that presence, is it knows all the faults of the Corinthians, but it lacks, debars or scorns all their gifts.

12. Should I have the time ...

The one thing I have not fully addressed in this book is how you might go about receiving the gift of tongues, other than to say we should 'eagerly desire the greater gifts'. I intend to cover this issue and much more in a further work on the rest of the spiritual gifts.

This volume covers the core argument; whether the gifts can be received today. I have used the gift of tongues to explain why contemporary arguments against the continuance of the gifts are not justified by the Bible. Only once this has been done can one go on to say more.

This work is quite long enough in its own right. If the reader is not convinced by my words (or more importantly, those of Paul) they will in any case not be interested in hearing any more. So any further writing on the subject properly belongs to a sequel. For news of this and any other theological works I may write, please see my Facebook group, "The Adventures of Tyndale's Ploughboy"



or my website, <https://www.tyndalesploughboy.com/>



Romans 15:33

The God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Rear cover:

The Garden of Love, by William Blake (1757 – 1827).

*I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I never had seen:
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.*

*And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And 'Thou shalt not' writ over the door;
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.*

*And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.*