

Tongues and Prophecies

**How We Know These
Gifts Have Ceased**

Introduction

After the apostles died, for almost 1800 years no major part of the Christian church doubted that the gifts of tongues, prophecy and miraculous knowledge had died with them.

Today, the shoe is on the other foot. Probably, worldwide, a majority of evangelical Christians believe that these gifts exist today. They believe that the Bible never speaks of their ceasing. Instead, it tells us to seek them!

It is very important for a Christian to get this question right. It will have an enormous effect on his church life, and his personal Christian growth. If these gifts are being given today, then some Christians – including me – are guilty of shunning a true work of God. There are great blessings being made available, and we are rejecting them – how insulting to God that would be. On the other hand, if these gifts are not for today, then many Christians have been greatly deluded; and many churches are being led astray. It is being said “God has said”, when God has not said.

I have written this booklet because I am quite convinced that the Christians who went before us were right. I believe that the Bible, Christian history, and the present goings on all point in one direction.

I know that a number of my fellow believers will read this last statement and shake their heads in sorrow and disbelief. To them, the evidence is so overwhelming, that it is hard to understand how anyone can take the position I do without deliberately rejecting the Holy Spirit. But bear with me. I have reasons!

My aim in this booklet is to give the reasons why I today, and the Christian church through history, has taken this position. I want to challenge my charismatic brothers and sisters, showing them that there are a number of arguments that they need to look at carefully. I want to show my non-charismatic brothers and sisters that they can take the position they do with confidence. I want all who love the Lord who read this booklet to be brought to a better understanding of these issues, and to be drawn closer to each other in “the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13).

I have tried to make this booklet simple, so that every Christian reader can understand it. I have put forward my arguments; I have tried to answer objections to them. I hope that you will find my reasons persuasive.

May the Lord bless you.

David Anderson, April 2007

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1 – A few words about spiritual gifts

I want you to know what I'm talking about. Before we can talk about two or three gifts in particular, we need to see the big picture.

Without the Holy Spirit, Christian life would be utterly impossible. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, *Christians* themselves would be impossible (John 3:5). The person who does not have the Spirit does not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9).

The Spirit is totally involved in every stage of Christian experience. The Spirit convicts a person of sin. He gives them new birth. He unites them to Christ. He leads them in the way of holiness. He gives assurance of God's love. There is no question about any of these things.

There isn't any question either about the reality and necessity of spiritual gifts. The Bible tells us about a number of spiritual gifts. These are of many different kinds – and they are all essential for the health of the church. The church is pictured in Scripture as being like a human body. The parts are all different – but all needed. The health of the whole depends on the health of each part. No one part is independent of any other. And it is through the exercise of spiritual gifts that the Lord is served, and the church is built up, and God is glorified.

So, the “debate” between charismatics and non-charismatics is not about:

- Whether the Holy Spirit is at work today. Of course he is!
- Whether that work is necessary. We all agree that without the life-giving Spirit, there can only be spiritual death.
- Whether that work is miraculous. Of course it is; there is no greater miracle than when a sinner is born again, stops trusting his own wisdom, and instead comes to trust in Christ.
- Whether spiritual gifts are needed by the church, or available today. Of course they are! A church in which no spiritual gifts are exercised is not a living body – it is a rotting corpse.
- It is not even a debate about whether God can heal today. All my non-charismatic friends happily agree that God can do so.
- Neither is it a debate about what personal experiences the Spirit does or does not bring to individual believers. There is a wide range of answers to this question, and none of them rely on a particular answer to the question we are answering.

What this “debate” is about is about something much more limited. The question is: “Are the miraculous gifts which characterised the times of the apostles still given today”. That is, it is about a limited number of gifts – particularly tongues, prophecies, healings and knowledge. It is about whether there are particular Christians in the churches today, who are given these gifts to use in the church. We

are not asking whether God can do miracles today. we are asking whether God has given particular miraculous gifts to particular Christians to use in the churches, just as he did in apostolic times. In short, the question is: “Are the miraculous gifts of 1 Corinthians 12-14 included amongst the gifts that the Spirit gives to Christians today?”.

Now that we know what we're talking about, we can continue. Let me give you eight reasons why I believe you should agree with me that the answer to this question is “No”.

Reasons for saying that the gifts are not with us today

Reason one: Today's tongues are not Biblical tongues.

Suppose you had a friend who believed that somewhere on earth, dinosaurs were still alive today. But what difference does it make – unless someone can actually meet one?

Suppose now that your friend tells you that there are actually ten dinosaurs in his garden, and you can see them today. Do you want to see them? Of course!

So you go to his garden. And there you see ten small fluffy, furry animals with tails, chasing mice, leaping up onto the wall and down again, and purring. Will you be convinced? I don't think so! You'll say to your friend “Those aren't dinosaurs – those are cats!”.

How many cats does it take to prove that dinosaurs are still around? Of course, it is completely irrelevant. A million cats will tell you nothing about anything other than cats. And that is my point. As we look into the Bible at what the gifts of tongues was, and compare it with what is called “tongues” today, we will see a vast difference. If tongues really do exist today – then they do not exist in the churches which are claiming them. Maybe there is a dinosaur hidden somewhere in a jungle somewhere. But I'm certain there isn't one in our friend's back garden!

Foreign Languages

In English, the word “tongue” can either mean the thing in your mouth, or a language (e.g. “my mother tongue is English”). It is the same in the Greek.

Tongues in the Bible were ordinary foreign languages. They were languages spoken by someone upon the earth. They communicated ideas and knowledge using words, sentences and paragraphs – as any language does. What was miraculous about them was that the speaker had never learnt the language he was speaking. He spoke the very words of God, in a language he had never studied himself.

This is quite easy to prove. On the day of Pentecost, all the crowd present were Jews (Acts 2:5). But they were not all Jews from Jerusalem. They were Jews from all over the known world (Acts 2:5). They all spoke at least one shared language (Greek, Hebrew, Latin) so that they could communicate with other people in Jerusalem. But they also each had their own mother tongue – the regional or tribal language of their immediate family or clan. It is very similar in many cities in the world today, especially in Africa – everybody speaks the shared language, but also has their own tribal tongue. As the apostles spoke in “tongues” at Pentecost, these people from around the world heard their own languages being spoken. It says so in Acts 2:8. It was not a mere “ecstatic sound”. It was a meaningful declaration of “the wonderful works of God” in human languages (Acts 2:11). It was a real communication that could be deciphered and understood. Luke writes that the apostles spoke in “other” tongues (Acts 2:4). Other than what? Other than the tongues they spoke in usually – such as Greek and Hebrew. By using the word “other”, Luke makes it undeniable that tongues are languages.

Were Tongues At Pentecost Unique?

Some people say that tongues are different after Pentecost. Either, they say, tongues are different for Gentiles than for Jews, or they say that tongues are different in the churches than on that first day. Tongues since then, it is suggested, are a kind of ecstatic speech which cannot be translated – not human languages.

However, the Bible contradicts this idea. When the first Gentile was converted, Cornelius (Acts 10-12), the gift of tongues was also given. Acts 10:46 records that Peter and his fellow Jews “heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.” What did they do when they spoke in tongues? They magnified God. The tongues again were a real communication, speaking great things about God – not a nonsense language that communicated nothing. What did “tongues” mean to Peter? He had been there at Pentecost, where they were foreign languages. For Peter to hear these Gentiles speak in “tongues”, must mean he heard the same thing. Otherwise we have Luke using the same word to describe two very different things – without explaining it at all! If something completely new happened, then how could Peter recognise what was happening? How could he then say “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” (Acts 10:47). Obviously Peter saw *the same thing* happening to Gentiles as had before happened to Jews. This is the very point – Jews and Gentiles are equal, in one church. This was shown by the Holy Spirit giving the same gift. If he gave a different gift, how could Peter have ever come to that conclusion? Peter's own words settle it in Acts 11. In verse 15 he says “the Holy Spirit fell on them, as on us at the beginning” and in verse 17, he describes it himself as “the same gift”.

Aren't Tongues An Angelic Language?

Some people have pointed to 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 14:4 to prove that tongues are not real languages which communicate truth. These verses, they say, prove that

tongues are a heavenly language, not a human one. These verses, they say, show that even the tongues speaker himself did not understand what he said. I answer this objection later on in the booklet, in “Objection four: tongues are a private/angelic prayer language.”

Tongues Today?

Wherever I have found a church which claims to have the gift of tongues today, the “tongues” which they have fails the Biblical test. The noises made are always highly repetitious and unstructured, unlike any real language. The speakers claim that their language is angelic, and not human. They say that it is the ecstatic experience that counts, not whether any truth is understood by it. They say that they themselves cannot understand what they are saying. All of these things remind me of cats and dinosaurs. Whether dinosaurs still exist somewhere today is one question. But there is no question that my neighbour’s cats are nothing to do with it.

Reason two: Today's prophecies are not Biblical prophecies.

The same can be said about today's prophecies. Wherever you find people who claim to be prophets today, you find them making claims which no Biblical prophet ever made.

In the Bible, prophecies were infallible. Whenever a true prophet spoke, everything he said came to pass. Every single word was dependable. It was the word of God spoken. It could be announced with “thus says the Lord”. It had the same complete truth and reliability as the written words of the Scripture do.

Indeed, this point is so essential to Biblical prophecy that it was made a test for it. If a supposed prophet ever spoke something that didn't happen, then that was the proof that he was a charlatan. The role of the prophet was so holy, and so serious, that God commanded those who spoke false prophecies to be put to death. No true prophet would ever do such a thing. The classic text for this is in Deuteronomy 18:20-22:

“20 But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. 21 And if you say in thine heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' 22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.”

According to the Bible, a man who admits that he might be mistaken is also admitting that he is not a prophet. For a man to say that he is a prophet, and that he might be wrong, is to contradict himself. If one is true, the other is not. The Bible does not know anything about mistaken prophets. It calls some men prophets – these men never made mistakes. Those who made mistakes, it calls charlatans and deceivers.

A Different Kind Of Prophecy?

In order to get around this truth, some charismatics have argued that the gift of prophecy is a different kind of prophecy. They say that the gift of New Testament prophecy is different to Old Testament prophecy. New Testament prophets, they say, can make mistakes. I consider this objection in objection five, below.

Reason three: The Biblical gifts marked out the apostles.

There are good reasons to believe that the miraculous gifts would end with the times of the apostles. This is because of the purpose of these gifts. One of their important purposes was to mark out the apostles. There were all kinds of men running around the Roman world, with all kinds of messages. There were all kinds of teachers in Israel, claiming to be reliable guides of truth. But when God sent out his own messengers, he also accompanied them with mighty signs and wonders, so that they might be authenticated as being truly sent by him.

There have always been people who claim to be able to work miracles. There are plenty of them in all kinds of occult and pagan religions, as well as within Christian churches. But God's true spokespeople in the Bible were marked out by being able to perform miracles far out of the ordinary. Charlatans can claim to heal people with back-ache, or other invisible internal injuries. All kinds of "faith-healers" can bring relief, using hypnosis, suggestion and other psychological techniques, to sufferers of certain kinds of problem. But Jesus Christ and his apostles performed miracles which were very different. They caused the lame to walk – even those who had never walked before. They caused the blind to see. They raised the dead. They did this all instantly, with a word. In all of this, God was giving a clear testimony that nobody needed to doubt – these were not your average faith-healers... they were really and truly sent by him. Sadly, the kind of "healers" found in Christian circles today have completely retreated from this, and do nothing more unusual than is done by all kinds of claimed healers in other religions.

In 2 Corinthians 12:12, Paul is completing part of his letter in which argues for the reality of his apostleship. It seems that in Corinth there were many impostors. Paul says "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." According, then, to Paul, there were certain signs which were "signs of an apostle". They marked him out as the real thing. It is obvious then that these signs could not be intended to continue after the apostles were gone. If they were, then they would not do their job. They would be marking out something else! They would not be showing that the apostles really were unique.

Whenever we find the miraculous gifts in the New Testament, it is in the circle of Christ and his apostles. When the gospel was first preached in Samaria, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit did not come. That is, they did not come until an apostle was sent from Jerusalem (8:14-18). It is clear that the gift of the Spirit here included the miraculous gifts, as it was something that Simon could see (verse 18). This is the consistent pattern throughout Acts – the gifts followed the apostles.

The church today has no need of any new apostles. The apostles that Christ appointed faithfully laid the foundation. Their testimonies are preserved for us in Scripture. We have their teaching. It is only if that teaching is lost that new apostles will be needed to teach the church again. And if there are no new apostles, then no signs are needed to mark them out. Someone might ask “don't we need miracles in the church in order to prove that the church is from God?” The answer is no. The miracles that were done 2000 years ago are all recorded for us to read about. If we need new ones for new generations, then by the same argument we need Christ to re-appear bodily as well. If on the other hand, the written record of his resurrection is enough, then the same goes for miracles too. Every true believer today has believed, without seeing Christ in the flesh. So why is there so much hankering after miraculous signs?

Reason four: Pentecost does not need repeating.

Christians who think that the same gifts ought to be in churches today as in apostolic times fail to understand the significance of Pentecost. They say that every age ought to see its own Pentecost. This misunderstands what the real significance of Pentecost was.

The gifts at tongues at Pentecost was a powerful sign. Up until that time, God had been dealing with only one nation – the Jews. Other nations had only played bit-parts in his plan. God had dealt with a single people, in a limited part of the world. He gave the Scriptures in Hebrew (and a tiny part in Aramaic), speaking only to Jews. But at Pentecost, this all changed. Now, God was speaking to the whole world. God was widening his purposes to take in all nations. He would now have a church made up of people of every tribe, people, language and culture. He would now fulfil his promise to Abraham, that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The gospel and the people of God were going international!

Two things are now obvious. First, it is obvious how appropriate a sign tongues were. God was now for the first time speaking the languages of the world! Secondly, it is obvious that Pentecost was a unique event. It is not something that can be repeated. The gospel was given to the nations. It cannot now be given again as if new. What remains is not a new stage in God's plan; but the completion of the stage that has already begun. God does not need to send signs to indicate that he is doing a new thing, because he is not doing a new thing. The church today does not have a new task, but the one given 2000 years ago when Christ told his followers to “go into all the world, and disciple all the nations” (Matthew 28:18-21).

Paul says that tongues were given as a sign in 1 Corinthians 14:22ff. He says that they were a sign given for unbelievers. When you hear something that you cannot understand, says Paul, it is not a sign of blessing. If God speaks to you but his words are hidden from you, it is a sign of judgment. God is speaking, but withholding his words so that you can't hear. It was foolish for the church at Corinth to think that such a thing was good. And it is foolish for churches today to think that it is good to have “tongues” which nobody understands. In verse 21, Paul quotes Isaiah. Isaiah spoke of the Babylonians coming to Jerusalem, to destroy it. God had spoken to the Jews in

their own language, but been ignored. Now, Isaiah announced, a people who come who they would not understand – and it would mean judgment. At Pentecost, when the Jews heard God's word being spoken in foreign languages it was good news for foreigners, but it meant judgment for Jews. Within a generation, the nation of Israel would be destroyed for its refusal to hear God's word. That word would now be taken away from them, to the nations of the world. Of this, tongues were a sign.

Reason five: The Bible predicts the passing away of these gifts.

The main purpose of 1 Corinthians 13 is to insist that love is essential. All the spiritual gifts you could ever imagine will still not make you anything spiritually without love. In this context, though, Paul also makes it clear that the spiritual gifts were not intended to be permanent – they were only for the early days of the church.

I am aware that many Christians believe that 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 speaks about heaven, and not about any time before then. I know that many godly men have taught that it is far-fetched to see these verses as speaking in any way about a completed Bible. I must respectfully disagree!

In these verses, Paul describes 3 things as passing away (tongues, knowledge, prophecy, v8) and 3 remaining (faith, hope and love, v13). However, faith and hope will pass away at the second coming. At the second coming we shall have sight, and faith will not be needed (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith only has to do with things not seen (Hebrews 1:11). At the second coming, hope will give way to fulfilment. When we possess something, we no longer need to hope for it (Romans 8:24). If, then, Paul is speaking about a time when faith and hope remain, then he cannot be speaking of the second coming. If he was speaking of the second coming, then he would have spoken of five things passing away, and only one (love) remaining.

It is a fact of history that the miraculous gifts disappeared from the churches at around the time the apostolic era closed. They were then hardly heard of at all until the early 19th century, when Edward Irving claimed that they had reappeared in his church. Even amongst charismatics it is common to speak of the supposed presence of the gifts in their churches as a “restoration”. Something is “restored” when it is given back after being taken away. To speak of a “restoration” means that charismatics have conceded the point – the miraculous gifts did leave the church.

The reason why Paul says that the gifts of revelation had to be taken away was because they were partial (verse 9). How were they partial? As revelations of the mind of God. They were not partial in their truthfulness – every word of God spoken by them was reliable. They were partial in that no prophet or tongues speaker could give the church the complete picture. Paul says that they would be done away with when something complete came (verse 10). The Greek word used in verse 10 is the same one as is translated “mature” in the next chapter (1 Cor. 14:20). It means something fully grown. It is never once used in the Bible to refer to heaven. If it meant heaven here, then it would be unique. A partial revelation is passing away.

What is the complete thing that is coming? Obviously it must be complete in the same area that the partial thing is partial! The gifts were partial revelations. The complete thing must be a complete revelation. Paul said that a full revelation of God's mind for the church was coming. When God had delivered to the church a complete record of his will and purpose for them, he would take the partial gifts away. If tongues and prophecy still continue today, then it implies that God has still not revealed a complete guide for the church. Everything we believe must be provisional! This is a great insult to Jesus Christ as the church's perfect prophet – because we believe that he has given the church all that it needs.

The illustration that Paul uses in verse 11 is very telling. He uses the illustration of growing up to maturity. A boy, when he becomes a man, leaves behind childish things. There is nothing wrong with toys. But when a boy becomes a man, he will gradually but definitely leave them behind. He will not be lament their passing. He will simply have moved on to adult things. This is a perfect illustration for the passing away of the gifts. It happened gradually, not in an instant (which again shows it cannot be the second coming). It happened naturally, as the church grew to maturity. As the church received the complete written word of God as the apostles completed its authorship and as it was widely circulated, the need for miraculous partial revelations passed away. Nobody who was thinking rightly would lament losing a miraculous partial revelation when they instead had the full word of God that they could pick up and study wherever and whenever they pleased.

The phrase “face to face” in verse 12 clinches this argument. Commentators agree that Paul is making a clear reference to Numbers chapter 10. In Numbers 10, Aaron and Miriam grumbled about Moses, saying that they were also prophets as he was. God intervened to correct them. They were indeed prophets, but Moses was a prophet of a far superior type. All other prophets received their revelations in a dark and mysterious way. Moses received his word by word, hearing God speaking directly to him. This, God described by using the phrase “face to face” (or “mouth to mouth”). Moses was forbidden from actually seeing God's face; God told him that nobody could do this and live (Exodus 33:20). In Scripture, to be “face to face” with God does not mean to see something. It means to have a clear, word by word revelation of God's will. This is what Moses received. This is what Paul promises the church. He is not talking about the second coming. To refer it to the second coming is very bold and arrogant – it is to take a Scriptural phrase and give it a new meaning. Rather, we should refer it to the arrival of a full verbal revelation. It is true that Paul does not use the word “Bible”, or talk about “the closure of the canon”. That is because it is not his purpose in the context to discuss these subjects. His purpose was simply to say that the gifts were partial, and would be replaced. He did not go into any of the details of precisely when or how that would be. But, he gives us an outline. With the benefit of hindsight, we can clearly identify the completion of the Bible as the event spoken of here.

Reason six: These gifts were necessary then, but unhelpful today.

We will have a clearer understanding of the reason for the gifts if we understand more about the situation of the early church. It is because many Christians today do not understand this, that they think that the church has lost something if it does not have the revelatory gifts.

If you were a New Testament Christian, then for your spiritual diet you had the 39 books of the Old Covenant. You might also be visited by apostles from time to time. You might also have letters written to you by apostles – or copies of letters written to other churches by apostles. Your knowledge of the “big picture” of God's plan for his New Covenant people was limited. You had the revelation of the Old Testament, but compared to what God intended his New Testament people to have, there were holes in your knowledge.

The revelatory gifts were provided by God to “make up” for what was lacking. There would be people in the churches who were prophets, and others who spoke in tongues together with those who could interpret. These people spoke and announced truths directly from God. The truths which they announced were the ones which God saw the church needed to hear – but could not fully understand on its own, because as yet they did not have the 27 books of the New Testament.

The church today stands in a completely different position. Every Christian is able to pull down a Bible of his shelf whenever he pleases. Every church can be equipped with men who have a thorough understanding of God's mind for his church. No miracles are required to attain to this understanding – only hard work and prayer.

For God to give gifts of revelation to his church today would be unhelpful for several reasons. Firstly, it would present a severe temptation to laziness to pastors and teachers. If there are people in the church who can speak God's words infallibly and immediately, they might think, then why trouble myself with all this study? Why slog over my Greek verbs and systematic doctrine when someone on Sunday morning will be speaking without error through the Spirit of God? Secondly, faith which depends on miracles is weak faith. Strong faith is able to rely upon God even despite the most apparently adverse of circumstances. Job said “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”. Faith believes God's promises, even though everything may be appearing to turn out otherwise. If God regularly intervened in the life of the church with miraculous interventions, then our weak flesh would quickly fasten on to these appearances, and we would never be able to grow to the full maturity which God intends us to grow to, whereby the fact that he has spoken in his word is enough for us, whatever else we may see. Thirdly gifts of revelation would be unhelpful today because they would draw attention away from the perfection and sufficiency of God's word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God has delivered us all that we need – so that we do not need to rely upon any man but can check everything we hear to see if it is so (Acts 17:11). If we had miraculous revelations coming to us, then this would tend to draw attention away from the perfection of what God has given us. It has to be said that the

Christian who thinks that the Christian life requires something more than the Bible accompanied by the Holy Spirit, is a Christian who has a very poor grasp on just what the Bible is. Churches which claim to have tongues and prophecies are not to be envied. They are to be pitied for the spiritual poverty and lack of understanding that such a claim implies.

Reason seven: The greatest eras of church history lacked these gifts.

Since the apostles died, there have been many great and glorious periods in church history. The first amongst these is the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. At this time, after centuries of darkness covering all except very small pockets of the world, whole societies began to hear the gospel clearly preached again. The church turned away from man-made traditions, and sought to obey the words of God instead. The Reformation has been the greatest influence on the world to the present day. But the Reformers knew nothing of any supposed revival of the revelatory spiritual gifts.

The same story will be found wherever we look over church history. The times of the Puritans, the 18th century revival under such men as the Wesleys and Whitefield, the New England awakenings in the time of Jonathan Edwards, the founding of the modern missionary movement through such men as William Carey and Hudson Taylor, all tell the same story. Great spiritual progress was made through ordinary men being blessed to an extraordinary degree – not through miracles. It was not until the 20th century that the idea that a religious revival must be accompanied by prophecies and tongues started to take hold. And it is the 20th century which has, in the Western world, seen the greatest religious decline in the last 500 years. Is it really possible to believe that God has restored the charismatic gifts to the church – and it has not even helped to arrest the decline? Is it possible to believe that such great revivals happened in the past without any such gifts – but that when such gifts were given, they had such little effect?

Reason eight: The fruit of today's gifts fails the Bible's tests.

The charismatic movement is very large. And within that vast size, there have been many godly Christians. But as a whole and judged by its large-scale fruits, the movement must be found wanting. Christ gave his disciples a principle for testing teachers and movements. He said, “Therefore by their fruits you shall know them.” (Matthew 7:15-20). The charismatic movement took off in Britain and America in the 1970s. The years in which it has existed have coincided with the almost complete collapse of Christian influence in these societies. Until the rise of the charismatic movement, people generally knew what an evangelical Christian believed. Today, a generation on, most pastors lament that even those who attend church regularly often have dire Bible knowledge. Before the charismatic movement arose, it was generally assumed that Christians did not get involved in conduct that was thought “worldly”. It is true that some will always take separation to an excess. But the charismatic

movement has all but deleted the whole concept of separation from the world from Christian thinking. Is it possible that the charismatic movement is God's movement to revive the church? Then what went wrong? Plenty of churches split when the charismatic movement arrived. Countless hours have been spent in the controversies it has created. But where is the renewal that it promised? If it was sent by God to renew the main denominations, then why are they today worse than they have been for 500 years? Where is the good that it has done to outweigh all of this? In the revivals recorded in our history books, whole towns changed in their tone as the gospel was embraced. The effect of the charismatic movement has not been to change the world. It has changed the church, certainly. But the world has been largely untouched.

These things are not pleasant to hear. No doubt many people will think it is most unloving of me to say so. But is it not true? We can read in our history books about revivals which God has sent in the past. The results of the charismatic movement look nothing like them. If a tree can be judged by its fruits, then the charismatic movement has been found wanting.

Answers to common objections

Objection one: You cannot say that all those Christians are deluded!

To say that large numbers of people are wrong, you must either be very arrogant, very ignorant, or very sure! However, this objection does not support the charismatic case at all. If the spiritual gifts were *not* withdrawn from the church as the apostolic age closed, then the number of those who have been deluded is far vaster than otherwise. The greatest eras in church history have taken place without any gifts. The charismatic movement did not take off until the 20th century. Nearly 1900 years had passed.

The fact is that if we are going to decide truth by counting numbers, then the charismatic claims must be rejected. The overwhelmingly vast majority of the church in the New Covenant age has not taught charismatic doctrine, but has taught the opposite. It has taught that the gifts belonged to the apostolic age, and were not to be restored.

The same objection as this one would prove that the Reformation was a mistake. The professing church believed and taught that salvation was by works. But was it deluded? Yet it was. God has not given any promise in Scripture that the majority will be right, or that he won't allow people to be led astray. In fact, he has promised the very opposite – to test our faith.

Am I saying then that those who claim to have gifts are deliberately lying – or worse, that they are channels for evil spirits? No. There may be a range of different explanations in different cases. But the fact is that similar phenomena to the

charismatic gifts – ecstatic tongues, unreliable prophecies, and small-scale healings – have been observed throughout the world in many religions for a long time. They are quite within the power of human beings to produce. They are no sign of the glorious and infinite presence of the Spirit of God.

Objection two: Without the gifts, we only have dead, empty worship.

If this is true, then the church had empty, dead worship for nearly 1900 years. Any Christian who seriously believes this objection is to be greatly pitied. Have they no knowledge of the power of the preached word? Do they not know that it means to sing with a heart full of peace and joy? Do they have no experience of being conscious that the Bible being read is actually the living God speaking to them? Do they not know what it is to draw very close to God in prayer? If we can see nothing of value in Christian worship unless miracles are being performed, then our spiritual life is in a very bad way.

Objection three: The Bible nowhere says that the gifts will pass away.

This objection has already been answered, particularly in reasons three and five above, where we have shown that this objection is false. However, even charismatics conceded that the gifts *did* pass away (otherwise they could not have been “restored”), and this is confirmed by over 1800 years of church history. So if everyone agrees that they *did* pass away, then whether or not the Bible predicts it is a moot point! The fact is that the Bible nowhere says that the gifts will be restored. Given that they did pass away, it is the charismatic who needs to show that the Bible teaches that they were to come back.

Objection four: Tongues are a private/angelic prayer language.

Some people have pointed to 1 Corinthians 13:1 and 14:4 to prove that tongues are not real languages which communicate truth. These verses, they say, prove that tongues are a heavenly language, not a human one. These verses, they say, show that even the tongues speaker himself did not understand what he said. This is a mistaken interpretation. In chapter 13, Paul is using deliberate exaggeration to make his point. His point is that whatever gifts you have, they are useless without love. Let us suppose, he says, that you have the most impressive gifts. And let us suppose that you have them far more than we can ever imagine! And so, in verse 2, he imagines a man having the gift of prophecy to such an extent that he knows everything! He understands all mysteries and all knowledge – he's like God! Of course, no real prophet ever knew this much. It is an exaggeration for effect. And, says Paul, let us

imagine a man having the gift of faith to such an extent that he can even re-arrange the landscape. He actually moves real mountains! Now, I am sure that nobody in the church at Corinth actually did this. It is what is called hyperbole – dramatic exaggeration to make a point. Because this is so, it is then obvious that in verse 1 when Paul says “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels” he is not giving us a definition of tongues. He is not saying “tongues are the languages of angels”. He is saying “Suppose that I have the gift of tongues to such a degree that I don't only speak human languages unlearned – but angelic ones too!”. It is clear, then, that to make this verse a definition of tongues is a major mistake.

It is also a mistake to use 1 Corinthians 14:14 to teach that tongues are an “ecstatic” gift (i.e. One which bypasses the mind, without communicating truth). This verse reads: “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful.” The wrong way to read this verse is as saying “something is going on in my affections, but nothing in my mind”. Whenever Paul has used the word “spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12-14, he has used it to mean “spiritual gift”, or “manifestation of the Holy Spirit” - which are two ways of saying the same thing. The word “gift” in verses 1 and 12 is not there in the Greek – it is added by the translators (and so put in italics in the KJV and NKJV). It is added, to help us understand what Paul means. When he says “my spirit” he means “my spiritual gift” or “the Spirit in me”. That is what he has meant up to now, and that is what he means now too. The right way to read the verse is “if I pray in a tongue, my spiritual gift is active, but the understanding I have does not benefit others”. It can easily be seen from verse 16 and 17 that Paul is not talking about whether the tongues-speaker benefits – he is talking about whether others hearing him benefit. The problem is that the other person hearing you is not edified, because he does not understand. Paul knows that the tongues-speaker himself understands, because he says that the tongues speaker edifies himself (verse 4). As he says throughout the chapter that without understanding nobody is edified (e.g. Verse 17), therefore it follows that the tongues speaker understood himself. The problem with foreigners (verse 11) isn't that they are speaking something which can't be understood at all because it is ecstatic angelic speech, or that they themselves don't understand. The problem with foreigners is that they speak things which the person listening doesn't understand!

Objection five: New Testament prophecy is different – see Agabus!

I am amazed that anyone can convince themselves of this. In the Bible, the progression from Old Testament to New Testament is one from lesser to greater. It is a progression from the incomplete, the partial, and the faulty, to the complete, the mature and the perfect. God's plan goes forwards, not backwards.

The climax of this plan is the coming of Christ. Christ is the ultimate prophet. Those who were prophets before him spoke over a great period of time, and in varying ways.

But Christ is the ultimate word of God to us (Hebrews 1:1-2). Are we to suppose that after this glorious climax, God's people are now meant to make do with something worse than what they had before?

To speak about prophets today is actually to insult Jesus Christ. It is to say that he did not complete the work of revealing the mind of God for the church. It is to say that he did not equip his apostles to lay the complete foundation for God's people. It is to say that he did not do all that the Father sent him to do. In other words, it is blasphemy.

Happily, though, it is also false. Jesus Christ did, through his apostles, deliver to the church all that he needed it to know. When Paul, at the end of his life, wrote to Timothy, he gave him the instructions he would need for the church to continue to future generations. He mentioned nothing about prophecy. But he did tell him to "Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard from me" (1:13), to "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." He did not foresee the church's faith being sustained by a continuing line of prophets, but instead told Timothy that "the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." In Paul's mind, a full body of truth had been delivered to the church. The church's future task would not be to receive more truth, but to faithfully uphold and pass on the deposit it had already received.

In the particular case of Agabus, many charismatics now admit that he is not an example of mistaken prophecy. In Acts 21:10-11, Agabus said "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owns this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" Firstly, we note that Agabus did not anywhere suggest that he was mistaken – he asserted dogmatically that his words were those of the Holy Spirit. The Jews did indeed deliver Paul into the hands of the Gentiles; Agabus did not specify that they would do so willingly. He was indeed bound, and that because of the Jews. It is arbitrary to say that because the Romans later bound Paul (21:33), that therefore the Jews didn't bind him themselves when they pulled him out of the temple (21:30). Luke simply does not record it. It is going too far to say that therefore it didn't happen, and that therefore Agabus was wrong.

Objection six: Peter says that we will *all* be prophets.

This is a reference to the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:17. Actually Peter does not say this. He said that the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, and that a great variety of people would prophesy. Nowhere does it say that everyone would be a prophet. This would prove far too much – there is no known charismatic church where everybody is a prophet. If you allow that Peter did not mean every Christian whatsoever, then this objection comes to nothing. Neither did Peter promise that there would be prophets in every age of the church – his words simply apply to those hearing them: the people alive in the apostolic age. The Spirit came for all flesh – and continues to work amongst all nations. This was signalled by the explosion in the number of prophets. The reality of the Spirit's work continues, even when the sign has passed away. Jesus is not being raised from the dead afresh every week – but the reality what it signified, and his risen life, certainly continue every day!

Objection seven: Without these gifts, the church is weak and ineffective.

The facts of history disprove this objection. The church had its greatest periods (such as the Reformation, the 18th century revivals, and the founding of the modern missionary movement) without any charismatic gifts. On the other hand, the era of the charismatic movement has also been the era of the most marked decline in the last 1500 years. The church has rarely been so weak and ineffective as since the time that the charismatic movement arose. I am not saying that this decline is the fault of the charismatic movement as a cause and effect; but I am pointing out that this objection has no connection to reality.

Objection eight: God is really blessing the churches with the gifts.

Good, praise his name! But how is this an objection? Can you prove that he would not bless those same churches more if they had different teaching about tongues? Is it certain that the only churches in the world being blessed are those with tongues? Is apparent blessing the guide to correct teaching? Surely not! If God did not bless us unless we had every doctrine right, he would never bless us at all.

Objection nine: You should just let people make their own minds up! When the world is so needy, shouldn't we just try to get along?

I hope that the information and arguments in this book will help people to make their own mind up. I am sure that if nobody was allowed to argue the case against the continuation of charismatic gifts, then it wouldn't be possible for anyone to make their mind up. You can't make your mind up until you've heard both sides! I believe that the peace and prosperity of the church will be greatly helped when we are more of one mind. I believe that the mind of God which we must seek to understand is revealed to us in the Scriptures. I hope that this booklet will help to draw others closer to that mind. But whilst we disagree, if we love the Lord Jesus Christ, I hope we will be able to still get along! Christianity unity and brotherhood is not helped by pretending that our differences do not exist. It is helped by seeking to overcome them in a spirit of love.

A final word

There are many good books looking at some of these questions more thoroughly. A few which are particularly worth reading are as follows:

Walter Chantry, *Signs of the Apostles*, Banner of Truth Trust

John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, Zondervan

Victor Budgen, *The Charismatics and the Word of God*, Evangelical Press

Peter Masters & John Whitcomb, *The Charismatic Phenomenon*, Wakeman

Peter Masters, *The Healing Epidemic*, Wakeman

O. Palmer Robertson, *The Final Word*, Banner of Truth Trust