Chapter 3.18

Tongues & the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14

The Misinterpretation of the Modern Tongues Movement

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Overall Objective

To accurately interpret 1 Corinthians 14 and to demonstrate popular and harmful errors in its interpretation.

Primary Points

- The only reason the Apostle says those who utter something in an incoherent tongue do so to God is, as he says, “because no one [else] understands” and only God knows what it is (14:2).

- This is supported by the Apostle’s statement a few verses later that those who pray in an incoherent tongue “will just be speaking to the air” (v. 9).

- No one could know if such an utterance was to God because those listening do “not know what you are saying” (v. 17), or to whom you are saying it.

- It is revealing that the Apostle says that the speaker of an incoherent utterance does it merely “in his spirit,” (v.2) instead of the Holy Spirit.

- Perhaps the real reason the Apostle says that a meaningless utterance in a tongue is “to God,” is to remind them that God will hold them accountable for such utterances, even the empty praise of a tongue. Which is unfortunate because no one can know what is even in such prayers. The Apostle is warning them that God will know if they are faking some kind of spiritual gift they really don’t possess.

- Glossaists make the demeaning and divisive claim from their interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14 that they alone have a gift from God that enables them to pursue fellowship with the Father, and spiritual edification and power in a way that other Christians cannot.

- The Apostle’s statement that “he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,” is a rebuke of the Corinthians’ selfishness, and a reference to what was happening in the temple worship of Greek mystery religions, not the introduction of a spiritual gift exclusively for the purpose of self-edification.

- There is no evidence whatsoever that praying in a tongue spiritually edifies someone, for practitioners are no more spiritual than others.

- The Apostle said he would do something better than “pray in a tongue,” which leaves the “mind . . . unfruitful.” That was to “pray with my [human] spirit [emotions], but also [at the same time] pray with my mind [understanding]” (14:14-15) which excludes the habit of praying in a tongue.

- Biblical references to ”praying in the Spirit” do not include the modern version of tongues.
A) The Proper Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14

1 Corinthians 14 is one of the most difficult passages in the NT to interpret. Hopefully, the points made in the previous chapters will help us in correctly understanding it. At this point it is necessary to revisit some of the verses in this passage that are not only difficult to understand, but that are commonly used in Glossaism for biblical justification of a “private prayer language” version of the gift of speaking in tongues.

Such a view was practically unheard of for almost 1700 years of Christianity. Nonetheless, the Evangelical Free pastor and ardent Glossaist Doug Bannister has written, “I am personally indebted to the charismatic movement for dusting off I Corinthians 12-14.” 1 On the contrary, we believe a great deal of proof texting has occurred in order to justify the tongues phenomenon that has arisen relatively very recently in Church history, and in the process, the passage has been horribly obscured. We hope the following will bring clarity to this passage of Scripture.

1) Is There a “Super Prayer” Gift?: 14:2, 28

a) Biblical problems with praying in a tongue

In 1 Corinthians 14:1-2 the Apostle writes:

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly [pneumatika: “spiritual things], but especially that you may prophesy. For [gar “because”] one who [lalōn: “utters something” 2] in [an unknown] tongue [glosse] does not speak to men but to God; for [gar “because”] no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries.

Obviously, many have supported their practice of a “private prayer language” with this statement. However, it is important to remember what we have learned in the previous chapter from the contexts and the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14.

First of all, we notice that for the first time in this letter the Apostle has switched from the use of glossais, which invariably describes the gift of tongues, to glosse, which, as demonstrated elsewhere, refers to the “unknown” tongue being spoken in the Corinthian congregation. 3 It is the “unknown” utterance that sounds no different from the pagan variety of praying in a “tongue” common in the Corinthian mystery religions, but which may be revealed as an utterance produced by the gift of tongues if it is miraculously interpreted. In fact, the Apostle clearly describes this utterance of a “tongue” as “unknown” when he says, “no one understands” it and the person is uttering “mysteries.” It is indeed “unknown.”

Secondly, why does the Apostle say it is spoken “to God?” 4 He clearly tells us in this very verse. The only reason the Apostle gives for saying that such an utterance is to God is because only the omnipotent God knows what the obscure utterance is. It is that simple. The Apostle’s use of gar (“because”) here is significant in that it is “a conjunction used to express cause, explanation.” 5 Therefore, it becomes obvious that the Apostle himself is explaining that an incoherent utterance spoken in an “unknown” “tongue” is “to God because [and only because] no one [else] understands” what the person is saying. He never intended to say more than that.

This view is clearly supported when a few verses later the Apostle makes an almost identical statement and says: “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking to the air” (v. 9). Here, the Apostle does not add the idea that an obscure utterance is “to God” as he did in verse 2. In verse 9, he simply says that such a thing is like “speaking to the air.”

Accordingly, John Calvin (1509-1564) commented on the “one who [utters something] in [an unknown] tongue” as one who, “preaches to himself and to the
walls.”

This parallel statement in verse 9 concerning the effect of an incoherent utterance should cast some doubt on the Glossaists’ insistence that the Apostle is talking about a meaningful private prayer language to God in verse 2, for he certainly is not in verse 9. We recognize that Glossaists will understandably insist we are not making enough of the statement in verse 2 that the utterance in a tongue is “to God,” but neither do they give proper value to the Apostle’s description of the very same thing in verse 9 as merely “speaking to the air.” At least we are attempting to reconcile these two statements, whereas we have never read an explanation, or even a recognition within Glossaism of the Apostle’s description of praying in a tongue in verse 9.

Thirdly, it is far too much to assume that an obscure utterance is necessarily a prayer to God. Throughout Scripture, the authentic Christian gift of tongues is described as speaking in tongues, not praying in a tongue. And again, it is “to God” only because He is the only one who would know what it is. We repeat, there is no way the Apostle, or any human, could know with absolute certainty, that the obscure utterance they were hearing was a prayer directed to God. The Apostle admits this a few verses later when he says:

**If you are praising** [“God” is not in the Greek and only an assumption!]

[only] with your spirit [not the Holy Spirit, and in an unknown tongue], how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying [or to whom you’re saying it]? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified. (14:16-17)

The NIV’s insertion of “God” is erroneous and misleading, again because no one could know this because the utterance is not understood. The NIV’s insertion of “may” is important and should not go unnoticed (cf. RSV, NRSV, ESV, NCV). While it is not in the Greek text, it would seem demanded by the context. If someone “does not know what you are saying” then there is no possible way that any human could know that the utterance was a prayer to God. Here is where Glossaist teachers consistently contradict themselves. For example, we had earlier quoted Dr. Fee stating in reference to 1 Corinthians 12:1-3:

Most likely, therefore, he [the Apostle] is reminding them of what they well know, that in some of the [pagan mystery] cults, “inspired utterances” were part of the worship... If so, then [the Apostle’s] concern is to establish early on, as v. 3 seems to corroborate, that it is not “inspired speech” as such that is evidence of the Spirit. They had already known that phenomenon as pagans. Rather, what counts is the intelligible and Christian content of such utterances.

Here, the Pentecostal expositor is rightly expressing the fact that the source of any incoherent utterance can only be known by the “content of such utterances.” Yet, when this gifted scholar comments on 1 Corinthians 14:2, he would seem to completely forget this truth and merely assumes what he wants, but cannot honestly do so. He writes:

The content of such utterances [that “no one understands”] is “mysteries” spoken “by the [Holy] Spirit... [I]t carries here the sense of that which lies outside the understanding, both for the speaker and the hearer.

Likewise, Dr. Fee’s translation of 1 Corinthians 14:16 is, “You, to be sure, are giving thanks well enough” is too presumptuous. While he rightly admits with the Apostle in 12:1-3 that no human can know if something is of the Holy Spirit apart from its “intelligible and Christian content,” he denies the need for such a thing here, erroneously assuming that the obscure utterance is from the Holy Spirit.

Fourth, we notice that the Apostle says this person that utters something in an unknown tongue “speaks mysteries [mysteria].” We have demonstrated elsewhere that this is a bad thing, not a good thing. Not only because this would seem to be a direct reference to practices in the pagan mystery religions, but because a “secret”
and unspoken mystery as described here is not Christian. “Mysteries” in a Christian context were to be proclaimed to others for their benefit, such as through the gift of prophecy. To withhold a mystery, as was done in the pagan cults, and similarly by one who speaks in an unknown tongue was a pagan practice, not a Christian one.

Someone might object that the Apostle says these “mysteries” are spoken to the Christian God and therefore does not have a pagan or negative connotation. We would ask why does God need to hear “mysteries” from a human? Is the human revealing something to God? Mysteries were from God to a person, and the Corinthians knew that. It would seem to be yet another way that the Apostle is communicating the uselessness and absurdity of such a practice, and relating it to the worship found in the Greek mystery religions.

Fifth, the fact that the Apostle says in 14:2 that the speaker of the incoherent utterance does it merely “in his spirit,” instead of the Holy Spirit, is intentional on his part and revealing. In fact, while Glossaists wish to continually insert a mention of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle never does, always intentionally speaking of the human seat of emotion in regards to speaking in an unknown tongue (cf. 14:2, 14, 15, 32). 12

The Greek word here in 14:2 for “spirit” is the common pneuma which can either be translated with a small “s” or a capital “S” depending, again, on the context. The NASB, NIV, KJV, NKJV, PME, and JB translate it “spirit,” whereas what could be termed the “looser” translations (TLB, NLT, CEV, NCV, TEV) have it “Spirit.” It would seem certain that in verse 2 “spirit” is the most likely translation based on the Apostle’s parallel statement in verse 14 that “if I pray in [an "unknown"] tongue [glosse] my [mou] spirit [pneuma] prays.” The Greek text there leaves no doubt that an utterance in glosse is merely by the person’s spirit, not the Holy Spirit.

It should be recognized that the human spirit is often distinguished from the Holy Spirit in Scripture (cf. Rom 8:16; 12:11; 1 Cor 2:11; 5:3-5; 7:34; 14:14-16, 32; 16:18; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:1, 13; Gal 6:18; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Tim 4:23; Plmn 1:25). 13 Therefore, there is no reason to interpret the Apostle’s references to “his spirit” (1 Cor 14:2) and “my spirit” (14:14-16) as referring to the Holy Spirit. 14 These are references to the human spirit.

Thus, the respected Bible scholar Albert Barnes (1798–1870) wrote concerning 1 Corinthians 14:2:

The word spirit here (pneuma) has been variously understood. Some have understood it of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit by which Paul says he was actuated. Others of the “spiritual gift,” or that spiritual influence by which he was endowed. Others of the mind itself.

But it is probable that the word “spirit” refers to the “will;” [sic] or to the mind, as the seat of the affections and emotions; that is, to the heart, desires, or intentions. The word “spirit” is often used in the Scriptures as the seat of the affections, and emotions, and passions of various kinds; see Matt. 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit;” Luke 10:21, “Jesus rejoiced in spirit.” So it is the seat of ardor or fervor Luke 1:17; Acts 18:25; Rom. 12:11; of grief or indignation; Mark 3:12; John 11:33; 13:21; Acts 17:16. It refers also to feelings, disposition, or temper of mind, in Luke 9:55; Rom. 8:15. Here it refers, it seems to me, to the heart, the will [sic], the disposition, the feelings, as contradistinguished from the understanding. 15

What then is meant in Scripture by the human “spirit”? While references to it can refer to various aspects of our “heart,” 16 Vine’s Expository Dictionary lists a primary one as “the sentient element in man, that by which he perceives, reflects, feels, desires,” 17 with some uses particularly including our emotions (cf. Matt 5:3; Luke 1:47; Acts 17:16). And this is especially the meaning of the human spirit when it is being contrasted with the mind, as it is here. Accordingly, Charles Hodge (1797–1878) reflected the common view of NT scholars when he wrote: “When spirit is to be distinguished from the understanding, it designates the affections [i.e. emotional desires].” 18
The fact that the Apostle intentionally says those who utter something in a “tongue” do so merely with their human spirit instead of the Holy Spirit should be another clear indication that the Apostle is not speaking of the same supernatural gift of tongues he had earlier described as a “manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit” (12:7), and also as a “work of one and the same [Holy] Spirit” (12:11). Again, the Apostle will not, and cannot, assume that such an “unknown” utterance is a “manifestation” or “work” of the Holy Spirit and neither should we.

Sixth, one question needing to be asked by those who claim the Apostle Paul is encouraging a “private prayer language” to God, is why wouldn’t such a marvelous practice be at least as great as prophecy? Whatever “praying in a tongue” is, its uninterpreted version is very inferior in spiritual value to speaking edifying words to people. Would the Apostle really be so down on an intimate form of prayer to God? Not likely.

Some may object that the Apostle is saying that prophecy is superior only in the assembly, which is the context of 1 Corinthians 14. On the contrary, Paul allows the practice of silently “praying in a tongue” in the assembly (cf. v. 28), and from the Glossaist’s perspective, the Apostle is saying such a thing is to be practiced in the public assembly, not just privately. Yet, throughout the passage he says time and energy would be better spent in the assembly practicing prophecy rather than “praying in a tongue.” This, again, is quite odd, if in fact it is a spiritually edifying and intimate discourse with God, as Glossaist claim.

The idea of a very private, exclusive, superior prayer language certainly reflects the values of American individualism, but not biblical, others-oriented, communal Christianity. This, in spite of the fact, that in the clearest biblical definition of what the gift was, the Apostle tells the individualistic minded Corinthians, “tongues are a [public] sign, not to [individual] believers, but for unbelievers” (14:22). And this is precisely how it operated in the clearest biblical description we have of the gift (cf. Acts 2:4-11).

Contrary to the “private prayer language” promoted in Glossaism, Jesus told us to pray communally, addressing God as “Our Father,” and asking Him together to “give us,” “forgive us,” and “lead us.” The value of such communal prayer is reflected throughout the NT (cf. Matt 18:19-20; Acts 1:12-14; 2:42; 4:23-31; 12:5; Col 1:9; 4:12-12; 2 Thess 1:11; 1 Tim 2:8).

Finally, we suggest there may be another reason that the Apostle reminds these Christians that an obscure, meaningless utterance is “to God.” It is to remind them that God will hold them accountable for every utterance from their mouth and that all utterances had better be authentic prayer and praise to God. The Apostle is warning them that God will know if they are faking some kind of spiritual gift they really don’t possess. Accordingly, the following warning from Christ comes to mind:

[Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him] [and the empty-minded man brings empty things out of the empty-mindedness in him]. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every [argus: “useless, empty”] word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matt 12:35-36)

It is not “careless” words that Christ is condemning here, as many translations erroneously render argos, but rather, “unfruitful, barren” and “unprofitable, hollow” utterances that mean nothing. Therefore, when we read that God will hold us accountable for even meaningless and barren utterances to Him, those who pray in a meaningless tongue should take notice.

We are reminded here of the Lord’s rebuke to His people, “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense [symbolic of prayer?] is detestable to Me” (Isa 1:13). How can Glossaists know for sure that the obscure, unintelligible prayers they pray in a babble they have merely learned, are not meaningless?
God says, “I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct” (Jer 17:10). What then does God find in the mind of those who pray in a mindless tongue? Nothing. And it is not good to come before God with empty prayers and praise, which is what empty-minded prayer and praise will automatically be.

The Apostle writes, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). Praying in a meaningless tongue is something we do “in the body” and it is “bad” because it mimics ancient and modern practices in pagan religions and offers God an empty mind, instead of a worshipful one. This is precisely why the Apostle says in this very passage that he will not pray or sing in a mindless, unfruitful tongue, but rather, will pray and praise with his spirit and mind so that it is not only meaningful to himself, but to God also (cf. v. 14-15).

While modern tongue practitioners can assume there is something meaningful in their meaningless utterances, God knows it is empty and will one day expose it as such because “There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known” (Luke 10:2). “This will take place on the day when God will judge men’s secrets through Jesus Christ” (Rom 2:16). If those praying meaningless, empty things to God do not know it now, they will know it on that Day, and we will mourn their loss of reward and waste of time, mind, energy, and “prayer” with them.

Therefore, if we do not ignore the reason the Apostle gives in this very verse, and the identical description in verse 9, a more accurate translation of the Apostle’s statement in 1 Corinthians 14:2 would be “one who utters something in the congregation that people can’t understand is just speaking to the air and only God will know what it is.”

Unfortunately, our Glossaist brothers and sisters read far too much into verse 2 that is not there and translate it, “One who speaks in an incoherent utterance speaks to God because the Apostle is introducing a completely different gift of tongues than that described in Acts and which enables a tongue speaker to fellowship in a more intimate way with God in a way that other Christians cannot.” Read that statement again, because it is precisely how Glossaism is interpreting the Apostle’s statement. The practical and divisive ramifications of such an arrogant claim will be discussed next.

**Pastoral Practices**

- We see again that the issue of the modern version of tongues is not merely a doctrinal one, but a moral one. If indeed our Father does not value empty-minded prayers, which is precisely what modern tongues is, then they are indeed at best wasting His and their time. But how dishonoring to our Lord. Therefore, there is some motivation to persuade those in Glossaism of their error.

**b) Practical problems with praying in a tongue**

Not only have many ignored the many biblical problems with interpreting the Apostle as encouraging the pagan practice of praying in an obscure, meaningless tongue, but they have also ignored the serious practical ramifications of such a teaching. Our Glossaist friends claim that someone who prays in an incoherent, mindless tongue has a gift from God that enables them to pursue fellowship and intimacy with God in a way that other Christians cannot. Let us seriously consider the potentially dangerous and divisive ramifications of such a teaching, because those advocating it, mere practitioners and mighty scholars alike, do not seriously consider the dangerous and divisive ramifications of it at all.
It would be one thing to claim that God would grant a spiritual gift especially to you, so that you might serve others in a way those without the gift cannot. And that may be true. However, it is quite another thing to claim, like Professor Storms at Wheaton College, that God would grant a spiritual gift especially to you in order that you can be “profoundly” helped in your “prayer life,” deepened in your “intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ,” and enhanced in your “zeal and joy in worship” in a way others without your spiritual gift will not be able to.  

Let us likewise remember that J. Rodman Williams states in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* that, “glossolalia is . . . the vehicle of communication par excellence between man and God.” There is simply no other way of interpreting this than concluding that those who do not have the “gift” of “praying in a tongue” are left with second-rate vehicles of communing with God. And let’s not forget that the Apostle clearly describes tongues as a gift (cf. 1 Cor 12:7) that cannot be earned, or learned, but is bestowed by the sovereign grace of the Holy Spirit (cf. 12:11).

This is precisely what John MacArthur meant when he said *Glossaism* has succeeded in dividing “the Christian community into the spiritual ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’” In giving gifts to his Church, God does not put some of his people at a disadvantage in relation to our interaction with Him. Remarkably, *Glossaists* have twisted a portion of Scripture originally written by an Apostle to rebuke the arrogance, false superiority, fake spirituality, and divisiveness that pagan practices of worship cause, and they have used it to support this very thing. And they add insult to injury when they label their private prayer language as “praying in the Spirit,” (cf. Jude 1:20) as Dr. Storms does, implying those who do not have the gift of praying in a tongue cannot really pray “in the Spirit,” or at least not to the degree they do.

We could ask that if such a wonderful gift of “super prayer” exists, why is it nowhere else eluded to in the NT? Why is this “super prayer gift” confined to only certain churches? And, if praying with the gift of tongues really does bring such wonderful edification to the believer, giving them special powers of communication with the Father, why would God withhold it from any of His children? Why hasn’t God granted us this wonderful gift of fellowship with our Father? What are non-*Glossaists* to think? And may those who pray in an unknown tongue never reply that the rest of us do not have this gift because we lack faith or “openness” to the Spirit of God!

Finally, wouldn’t we expect the practice of a Holy Spirit-empowered prayer gift to result in a noticeable superiority in a person’s relationship with God and their spiritual maturity, compared with those who do not practice such prayer? And yet, this has never been the case. There were many practicing a tongue speech in the Corinthian church, but its lack of spiritual maturity and intimacy with God is infamous. Likewise, (generally speaking), there is no superiority whatsoever in spiritual maturity, intimacy with God, answered prayer, or any other dimension of spiritual health in churches practicing “praying in a tongue” compared to those churches which do not. *Glossaists* insist on the spiritual value of praying in a tongue, yet ignore the fact that the godliest Christians throughout the Church’s history never exhibited their practices.

Accordingly, Dr. Carson, who otherwise supports the practice of “praying in a tongue,” is at least willing to admit:

The great movements of piety and reformation that have in God’s mercy occasionally refreshed and renewed the church were not demonstrably crippled because their leaders did not, say, speak in tongues. Those who have thoughtfully read the devotional and theological literature of the English Puritans will not be easily convinced that their spirituality was less deep, holy, powerful, Spirit-prompted than what obtains in the contemporary Charismatic movement. . . . It would be a strange calculus which concluded that a modern Charismatic lives on a higher spiritual plane than did, say, Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Count Zinzendorf, or Charles Spurgeon, since none of these spoke in tongues.
Likewise, Dr. Edgar writes:

The concept of a special gift for prayer and praise to God also seems to violate basic Christian teaching. The New Testament teaches that every Christian has full access to God through Jesus Christ. This access was obtained for every Christian by Christ's death on the cross (John 14:13-14; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). Every Christian is instructed to pray continually, but there is no implication anywhere in the New Testament that certain individuals have greater access to God or greater prayer ability.

To state that a special gift is necessary or better for prayer implies that ordinary prayer is deficient and that those without the gift do not have complete access to God the Father. This view of tongues amounts to the allegation that in some mystical sense the speaker can better communicate with or praise God by speaking apart from his understanding than by speaking words which have meaning to him. There needs to be some biblical explanation showing why this is better; however, none has been produced.

It is sometimes claimed that prayer in tongues allows greater freedom in prayer, but this can only be due to a psychological "letting go" since we are already free in prayer. There are no restrictions from God's side; therefore, the only restrictions would be in the individual's emotions. Yet such emotional release in prayer apart from rationality is not biblical prayer. Biblical prayer is prayer based on knowledge. 27

We'll say again that all sincere interpreters of Scripture should seriously consider the potentially divisive ramifications of the commonly accepted view of the tongue phenomenon, because those advocating it, mere practitioners and scholars alike, do not.

**Pastoral Practices**

• Has anyone in your congregation been intimidated by the arrogant and unbiblical claims of Glossaists concerning their supposed gift of prayer? Seek them out and comfort and instruct them in the fact that their coherent, natural prayers are much more pleasing and intimate with God than the incoherent gibberish of Glossaism that displeases Him and does not connect to Him at all.

2) *Was the Gift of Tongues Meant to be Self-edifying?: 14:4*

a) *The charge of self-edification was a rebuke to the selfish Corinthians*

In 1 Corinthians 14:4 the Apostle says, "**One who speaks in** [an “unknown”] **tongue** [glosse] **edifies himself.**" Dr. Grudem reflects the typical Glossaist interpretation of this statement when he writes:

[W]e would certainly expect that edification would follow [speaking in a tongue], even though the speaker’s mind does not understand what is being said. . . . Just as prayer and worship [which engages the mind] in general edify us as we engage in them, so this kind of prayer and worship [that disengages the mind] edifies us too, according to the Apostle. 28

First, such an interpretation ignores the moral context of the Apostle’s statement which makes it very unlikely that he is advocating a self-centered practice to the selfish Corinthians. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in all the NT, you will not find a more detailed description of, and a more challenging call to, a selfless love than in the verses immediately preceding the one in question.

In that description the Corinthians had been told that any kind of utterance without love is simply noise (cf. 13:1), which is why the Apostle instructed would-be tongue speakers who were not going to love others by edifying them, to "**keep**
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quiet” (14:28). They had been told that others-oriented love is the necessary attribute of anything claiming to be a work of the Holy Spirit or being valuable at all (cf. 13:1-3). This is precisely why the Apostle says that the “one who speaks in a tongue” does so in “his spirit,” not the Holy Spirit (14:2), and that to speak unintelligible words which no one understands is uselessly “speaking into the air” (14:9), and to “pray in a tongue” is to leave the “mind” barren (14:14).

If the Corinthians doubted that Christian love is only others-oriented, the Apostle clearly stated that it is “not self-seeking” (13:5). Accordingly, you will find in 1 Corinthians the most consistent, unrelenting verbal attack on selfishness (cf. 1:10, 3:1, 3; 4:7, 16, 18; 5:6; 8:9; 9:19; 10:23-24, 31, 33; 11:1, 12:7, 12-27, 31, 14:1, 16:13-14), including the clear commands: “Let no one seek his own good” (10:24) and “Do everything in love” (16:13-14).

Unless one wishes to claim the Apostle was contradicting himself, such commands leave no room for the one who “edifies himself” to be interpreted as doing something that pleases God. Love is the essential ingredient of anything truly from the Holy Spirit, and one thing is for sure, praying in an obscure, meaningless tongue has nothing to do with love. Glossaists can continue to presume it builds themselves up in some way, but they cannot claim with the slightest sincerity that such a practice has anything to do with Christian love.

Finally, not more than three sentences before the Apostle says, “he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself,” the Corinthians had read the Apostle’s summary statement on this whole issue: “Follow the way of love,” which is always others-oriented, as you “eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (14:1). Why do Glossaists seem unable to see how incompatible such a statement is with their interpretation of this passage and their practice of a tongue? The Apostle is essentially saying in 14:1 and 4: “Pursue spiritual manifestations that are loving, like prophecy. Uttering something in an unknown tongue is a spiritual manifestation that is not loving because it is self-centered.”

With all that said, it would seem presumption to assume that the Apostle thinks that when one “edifies [oikodomei] himself” that this is a good thing. Accordingly, we should notice that in this very epistle, the Apostle uses oikodomei “edify” in a negative sense. NT scholar Thomas Edgar writes:

> There are two possible basic meanings for the expression "he that speaks in a tongue edifies himself." The verb "edify," oikodomeo, means "to build up." Although this verb normally has a beneficial meaning, in I Corinthians 8:10 the Apostle uses the same verb to refer to a negative aspect of building up. He refers to a strong brother who may lead the weaker brother to an action which violates his conscience. This building up of the weak brother’s conscience is not positive edification but a negative building up or hardening that results in sin.

The direction of the edification, positive or negative, must be derived from the context. There are several indications that to "edify oneself" in I Corinthians 14:4 may have the negative connotation to build oneself up in the eyes of others. One of the basic problems the Apostle addresses in the letter to the Corinthians is the exaltation or building up of self. There were divisions apparently based on pride and self-glory (1:26-29; 3:3-7, 18, 21). Statements such as I Corinthians 4:6-7 make it probable that some were puffed up in regard to their gifts, particularly the gift of tongues. Thus, a negative self-exaltation was one of the problems at Corinth. 29

Indeed, in the same context as 8:10 where oikodomeo is used in a negative way, the Apostle likewise tells the Corinthians, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (8:1). They obviously did have a problem with wanting to puff themselves up, which the Apostle states here is absolutely opposed to "love" which "builds up" others. And so is someone who “speaks in a tongue [and merely] edifies himself.” Both a person who “puffs up” themselves and one who “edifies himself” are violating the essence of Christian love, and therefore, we would suggest that the “edification” that the Apostle speaks of in 14:2 is synonymous with
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the selfish, arrogant, empty puffing up he speaks of in 8:1 and that the Corinthians were obviously grossly guilty of.

Accordingly, immediately after, and in the context of these instructions about love, it is obvious that when the Apostle says "One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" that this is a rebuke, and only the self-centered Christianity that is so prevalent today would even allow it to be interpreted otherwise. It is a fact that our Christian ancestors for almost 1700 years of Church history understood the Apostle’s words as a rebuke of a selfish spiritual practice, and our generation should be ashamed for not insisting the same. Instead, unlike millennia of Christian forefathers, we have allowed, and even promoted this rebuke of a self-centered practice as an Apostolic encouragement to hotly pursue such a thing.

Interpreting "He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself" as a rebuke not only reflects the contexts (selfishness and pagan worship practices), but also a style of rebuke that the Apostle has already used in this letter. In 11:21 he tells the Corinthians "When you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else." Imagine then, that we would interpret this as a good thing that we should seek more of. This description of what they were doing is not intended to be a commendation of a selfish practice, but rather a condemnation of it and 14:4 is likewise.

If our generation does not understand this as a rebuke, it is clear that the Corinthians were to understand that authentic spiritual gifts granted by the Holy Spirit were inseparable from love for others, and diametrically opposed to self-centered edification. Modern readers may interpret the Apostle as saying that there is a legitimate and valuable spiritual gift that works privately to edify only the self, but it is absolutely certain that the Corinthians were not to understand the Apostle that way when this letter was first read to them in their congregation. One can easily imagine, in fact, that many of them no longer even dared to claim such a “gift” afterwards, for fear of embarrassment.

A private, self-centered “super prayer language” is a popular pagan and modern practice, but it is not an authentic Holy Spirit-empowered spiritual gift. The Holy Spirit gives gifts for public use, not private, and for the edification of others, not the self.

Accordingly, John MacArthur suggests that the Apostle is being “sarcastic” when he charges the tongue speaker with self-centered edification:

His sarcasm can also be seen in [1 Cor.] 4:8-10, and reaches its height in 14:16, “was it from you that the word of God first went forth?” . . . The Apostle here [in 14:4] is referring to the supposed value the Corinthians placed on their self-styled tongues-speaking. The satisfaction many of the believers experienced in their abuse of tongues was self-satisfaction, which comes from pride-induced emotion, not from spiritual edification. It is an illegitimate self-building, often building up nothing more than spiritual pride.

Pastoral Practices

• It is rather easy to critique modern Glossaists for their selfish tongues habit, but have we monitored all that occurs in our own life and church to ensure that we “Do everything in love” (1 Cor 16:13). Even legitimate ministries and practices in the Church can be done for selfish reasons, and we should learn from the rebuke the Apostle gives to modern Glossaists.

b) Real spiritual gifts are for the edification of others

Perhaps the clearest biblical contradiction to the Glossaist claim that they possess a Christian spiritual gift for the exclusive purpose of edifying themselves is the Apostle’s clear claim that, “to each one the manifestation of the [Holy] Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Simply put, there is no such thing as an act, empowerment, inspiration, or gift of the Holy Spirit that is exclusively for
the good of self, like ancient pagan and modern versions of “praying in a tongue” operate. As NT scholar Leon Morris puts it: “Spiritual gifts are incompatible with spiritual selfishness.” 32 Likewise, Frederick Dale Bruner has written, “In the Apostle’s understanding, it appears, you cannot take a gift home with you.” 33

In this very section concerning the nature and purpose of authentic gifts from the Holy Spirit, the Apostle gave his analogy of the mutually dependent and perfectly united “body of Christ” (12:12-26) which was to leave no room in the Corinthian’s mind for a self-centered spiritual gift given only for private use. Likewise, since all spiritual gifts are given by God for the benefit of others, the Apostle had told them, “since you are zealous of spiritual [pneumatikos: things], seek to abound for the edification of the church” (14:12 NASB). Clearly then, when a person “speaks in a tongue [and merely] edifies himself,” it is not a good spiritual thing to seek.

Therefore, there is no such thing as a Christian spiritual gift that is to be used “alone with God.” That’s not what they are for and the Apostle never taught such a thing. This is, of course, true for all the other descriptions of spiritual gifts in the NT as well. 34 The Apostle prefaces his description of spiritual gifts in Romans by again alluding to the interdependent body analogy he uses in 1 Corinthians and reminds the Roman Christians in regards to spiritual gifts that, “each member [of the body] belongs to all the others” (12:5). In Ephesians, the Apostle explains that the gifts are given, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12), not the self. The Apostle Peter says, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another” (1 Pet 4:10), not the self.

Although it is true that the use of one’s gift will edify them in the process, this is merely a by product of serving God and others. There simply is no room in the NT for claiming that the sole purpose of any legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit is to edify yourself. Does the evangelist evangelize for himself? Does the teacher teach for himself? Does the person with the gift of serving serve for their own personal edification? If they do, their gift certainly is not motivated by love, making its use meaningless (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). To claim that there is a legitimate spiritual gift given only for the edification of self is absurd and unbiblical. 35

Accordingly, John Calvin correctly comments in reference to 1 Corinthians 14:4, and expresses the universal belief of the Christian church for almost 1700 years when he writes:

He [the Apostle] accordingly shows, from principles already assumed, how perverse a thing this is, inasmuch as it does not at all contribute to the edifying of the Church. . . . The Apostle does, in effect, order away from the common society of believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves. 36

Likewise, commenting on spiritual gifts in the analogy of the body as the Apostle taught, the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT) states the obvious:

1 Cor. 12 teaches that the church is the body of Christ in both reality and function. It is made a reality by the presence of the Holy Spirit whose gifts are enjoyed and practiced by numerous individuals. But taken by themselves in isolation they [spiritual gifts] are without significance. They have significance only in relation to the whole fellowship. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” . . . .

These manifestations of the Spirit are marked out for the Apostle as given (not achieved by man), as expressions of divine energy (not human potential), as acts of service which promote the common good (not for personal edification or aggrandizement). 37

Even the Pentecostal seminary professor R. E. Cottle, states the obvious, but contradicts his own Glossaist position 38 in his entry under “Gifts of Healing” in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:
The charismata of 1 Cor. 12 are literally benefits or graces conferred upon certain individual members of the body of Christ for the use and benefit of the worshiping Church (v. 7). They are not the personal possession of the members who exercise them within the church community. They are, rather, manifestations of the Spirit through Christians who are serving the spiritual edification of the Church as a whole (vv. 8-11).  

Yet the modern version of the gift of tongues supported by Dr. Cottle does not match his own description of a genuine gift of the Holy Spirit. 

Finally, in addition to the moral context of selfishness, and the biblical view of spiritual gifts, we can apply what we have learned from the Apostle’s alternating use of *glosse* and *glossais* and notice that the Apostle again uses *glosse* here in 14:4 to refer simply to the incoherent utterances being spoken in the Corinthian church, not necessarily the authentic gift of tongues. 

The usually astute D. A. Carson, however, would seem to completely ignore both the moral context and the Greek text (if not common sense) when he says:

> Some commentators find the notion of self-edification so difficult that they interpret this [such that] the Apostle is actually rebuking the tongues-speaker for edifying himself. But this scarcely fits the context, when the Apostle goes on to encourage tongues-speaking (v. 5), which here must be tongues-speaking *without* interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification.

First of all, “the context” is not “to encourage . . . tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification” as Dr. Carson remarkably claims. The context is a diplomatic *rebuke*, promoting the public, others-oriented, and only-authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit, to the self-centered, contentious, puffed up Corinthians, *in a city* where “tongues-speaking without interpretation, and therefore in private and for self-edification” is a hotly pursued habit in the local temples of the Greek mystery religions. 

Secondly, Dr. Carson ignores the conspicuous switch from the *glosse* in verse 4 that is the common, incoherent, self-edifying, and possibly pagan tongue practice the Apostle wants to curb; to the *glossais* in verse 5 that is the miraculous and potentially others-edifying gift of speaking in foreign languages which the Apostle (hypothetically) wishes all the self-centered Corinthians *would* do. 

It was demonstrated in the previous chapter that not all of the Apostle’s references to the tongues phenomenon in Corinth refer to the authentic gift of speaking in tongues, and that this is the greatest mistake that evangelicals and Glossaists alike make when interpreting 1 Corinthians 14. And again, none of them seriously consider or discuss the ramifications of claiming that these verses teach that God is granting only some Christians a unique and more intimate method of fellowship with Him. 

Finally, Dr. Carson claims that real spiritual edification could occur even though the Glossaist would not understand what they are praying. This ignores the fact that God does not beneficially edify us apart from our mind, which is precisely why the Apostle insists throughout this passage that the utterances be interpreted so that there can be edification. 

**c) Edification requires understanding**

If some deny that the Apostle is rebuking the self-centered Corinthian Glossaists for edifying themselves, we would ask, how *could* meaningless utterances be spiritually edifying anyway? Dr. Fee attempts to answer when he writes: 

> The edifying of oneself is not self-centeredness, but the personal edifying of the believer that comes through [unintelligible] private prayer and praise [they do not understand]. Although one may wonder how “mysteries” that are not understood even by the speaker can edify, the answer lies in vv. 14-15 [where
the Apostle says praying in a tongue leaves the mind barren]. Contrary to the opinion of many, spiritual edification can take place in ways other than through the cortex of the brain.  

While Dr. Fee offers references to psychological studies that claim beneficial psychological effects for those who “pray in a tongue,” he does not answer the question how such a person can experience spiritual edification from the Holy Spirit without understanding, when the Apostle insists throughout 1 Corinthians 14 that nobody else can. While Glossaist can claim some sort of positive psychological or emotional effect from uttering sounds they don’t understand, the Apostle emphatically insisted that no spiritual edification could take place unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore understood (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17). Accordingly, never in Church history, did any orthodox branch of Christianity ever claim that spiritual edification could occur apart from our mental understanding, until modern Glossaism.  

Accordingly, we have written elsewhere:  

Edification simply doesn’t happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not real spiritual edification. Pagans believe that having bodily sensations and feelings aroused results in spiritual edification, but there’s no such thing in authentic Christianity. Christian edification is whole-hearted involving the understanding, not the half-hearted stimulation that pagans settle for, as we thoroughly discuss elsewhere as well.  

That is what the Apostle believed, and that is why he insisted that no real spiritual edification could take place unless the utterances in a tongue were interpreted and therefore understood (cf. 1 Cor 14:5-17, 26-28).  

Speaking considerably more reasonably, biblically, and humbly than practitioners of “praying in a tongue” often do, J. I. Packer states the obvious when he writes:

It is hard to believe that in [1 Cor 14:4] Paul can mean that glossolalists [tongue speakers] who do not know what they are saying will edify themselves, when in [the very next] verse 5 [and throughout the whole chapter!] he denies that the listening church can be edified unless it knows what they are saying . . . [The truth] that edification presupposes [requires] understanding is hard, biblically, to get round [or deny]; accepting it, however, would seem to entail the conclusion that glossolalia as practiced today cannot edify, which is a most unfashionable view to hold.  

But, we believe, a true view nonetheless. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, God does nothing to or through us except through our mind. That is how He created us.  

God did not create us to be spiritually edified apart from our reason, because all spiritual edification comes from an understanding and belief of the truth. Which is why the Apostle is so repetitive and insistent on the need for teaching in the Church throughout the Pastoral Epistles. It is because truth alone edifies Christians, that the King Himself taught the truth, and that the Apostle says the edification of the Church comes through truth-giving gifts (cf. Eph 4:11-15).  

Not only should we understand from Scripture that spiritual edification requires mental understanding, we can know this from experience. Once again, if in fact praying in an incoherent tongue is so spiritually edifying, why are its practitioners no more spiritually encouraged or empowered than those who do not? They may be more emotional, but everyone knows it would not only be unhistorical and inaccurate for tongue practitioners to claim any kind of practical spiritual superiority, but grossly arrogant as well. If praying in a tongue does what Glossaists claim it does, than it would show in lasting, obvious ways. But it does not.
Unfortunately, the anti-Christian and pagan idea that anything meaningful can occur without the mind is fashionable in our day. Accordingly, the very popular NIV Study Bible is unfortunately typical when commenting on 14:4:

This edification does not involve the mind since the speaker does not understand what he has said. It is a personal edification in the area of the emotions, of deepening conviction, of fuller commitment and greater love.  

This all seems to be a great deal of presumption. First, it can be immediately asked that if the gift had such wonderful self-edifying spiritual affects for Christians, why wouldn’t God grant it to all His children, because the Apostle clearly said He would not (cf. 1 Cor 12:30)? Do those who “pray in a tongue” have an avenue of intimate intercourse with our Father that He denies the rest of us? That is the unavoidable conclusion of Glossaism, and it is not only unbiblical, but arrogant and offensive.

Secondly, how can something that “does not involve the mind” result in a “deepening conviction,” “fuller commitment,” or “greater love” of anything? Do Glossaists exhibit a superiority in these things? Obviously not. While pagan religions believe that having bodily sensations and feelings aroused results in spiritual edification, there’s no such thing in authentic Christianity. Christian edification is whole-hearted involving the understanding, not the half-hearted stimulation that pagans settle for.

Accordingly, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) stated the obvious:

There is no other way by which any means of grace whatsoever can be of any benefit, but by knowledge. . . . Men . . . receive nothing, when they understand nothing; and are not at all edified, unless some knowledge be conveyed.

Edification simply doesn’t happen in a human apart from our understanding. Emotions and feelings will, but not edification.

Of course the practice of praying in a tongue can effect the emotions and ego of the user, just as it has for Eskimo witch doctors, Haitian voodooists, Amazonian Indians, and Corinthian-like pagans who have practiced the same thing the world over for centuries. It becomes obvious then that just because a practice may give us good feelings, it in no way proves that it builds us in a spiritual manner, and it cannot because the mind is not engaged.

Along these lines, surely the words of D. M. Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) need to be heeded:

Do not be swayed even by the fact that something . . . makes you feel wonderful. You may say, ‘Well now surely anything that makes me feel greater love to God must be right.’ Robert Baxter, to whom I have already referred in connection with the Irvingite movement [an early Glossaist movement in England], used to say that he had never felt so much love, the love of God in his heart, or so much love in himself to God as he did at this period. He was ready to leave his wife and family for God’s sake. He was filled with a sense of the love of God, he said, that he had never known before, but he came to see that it had all been misleading him.

So we must not judge even in terms of such feelings. You may say, ‘I have never known such love, I have never known such peace, I have never known such joy.’ The people who belong to the cults will often tell you exactly the same thing. So we must not rely upon our own subjective feelings. Do not dismiss them or discount them, but do not rely upon them. Do not say, ‘I feel this is right, everything in me says this is right, all my Christian spirit.’ It is not enough. The devil is as subtle as that. Remember our Lord’s word—’If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.’

And indeed, some of “the very elect” have been deceived when it comes to the real meaning of the biblical gift of tongues.
Pastoral Practices

- The fact that any real spiritual edification requires truth to be understood with the mind, should affect our ministry. Ensure that the worship music is full of truth, not just emotion. Appeal to the mind in your teaching for the Apostle said we can "be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind" (Rom 12:2).

3) Are We All Supposed to Pray in Tongues?: 14:5

In 1 Corinthians 14:5 the Apostle says, “I wish [thelō] that you all spoke in tongues [glossais], but I would rather have you prophesy.” Again, it would seem to us that he has intentionally switched to the Greek plural glossais referring to the authentic gift. His words cannot be interpreted as an encouragement for the Corinthians to practice the pagan variety of praying in an obscure, meaningless, self-centered tongue practiced then and today. The authentic gift was the miraculous ability to speak in a foreign language as a supernatural and authenticating sign of new divine revelation to the Jews, as it operated in Acts. The Apostle will soon remind them that this is actually what the gift is in verses 21-23 where he states that “Tongues . . . are a sign . . . for unbelievers.” And it is important to be reminded that this is the specific nature and purpose of the gift here, because it would seem that the Apostle cannot be taken so literally here.

First of all, he has not forgotten that all will not, and should not, possess the gift (cf. 12:11, 17-20, 30). Secondly, the force of the Apostle’s “wish” is not nearly as strong as many want to make it. The Greek word here (thelō) is used by the Apostle earlier in 7:7 when he says, “I wish [thelō] that all men were as I am” expressing his desire, not command, that all would be unmarried. Accordingly, J. Hering catches the sense here at 14:5 that “thelō does not express an order, but a concession in the form of a wish unlikely to be fulfilled (cf. 7:7).” Likewise, NT scholar F. F. Bruce comments: “He goes as far as he can with those whom he criticizes before interposing a caveat.” He then endorses Henry Chadwick’s comment, “The entire drift of the argument . . . is such as to pour a bucket of ice cold water over the whole practice.”

Also, any positive force intended in thelō here must be counterbalanced by the Apostle’s clear statement that he “would rather have [them] prophesy.” So does the Apostle really wish that all the Greek Corinthians had the gift of miraculously speaking in a foreign language as an authenticating sign to Jewish unbelievers of new divine revelation? Maybe, but probably not.

We would suggest again that this is where the relational context of this letter, as discussed in the previous chapter, may be helpful. Remember that some of the Corinthians despise the Apostle’s authority, but love speaking in incoherent utterances like their pagan peers. The Apostle desires to correct these rebellious, arrogant, “teenage” Christians and encourage them to curb their pagan practices. On the other hand, however, he will not say anything here that will ridicule or depreciate the authentic sign gift of speaking miraculously in foreign languages. His statement here would seem to accomplish both.

The similar statement by the Apostle in verse 18 that, “I thank God I speak in tongues [glossais, the real gift] more than you all” would also seem best interpreted as a figurative statement meant primarily to gently put the Corinthian tongues advocates in their place. It should be noticed too that again, the Apostle has switched to the plural Greek glossais here and is specifically speaking of the authentic Christian gift, not the generic or pagan speaking in an unknown “tongue” (glosse). No doubt, He did in fact exercise the real thing more than all of them combined, because few, if any of them really had the gift.

4) Did the Apostle Advocate a Habit of Mindless Prayer?: 14:14-15
a) The Apostle Paul’s instruction to pray with our spirit and mind: 1 Cor 14:15

In verses 14-15 the Apostle tells the Corinthians:

[A]nyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. If I pray in a tongue [glossē, “unknown utterance”], my spirit [not Holy Spirit!] prays, but my mind is unfruitful [akarpos: “unproductive, barren”]. So what shall I do? [And what should Christians do?] I will pray with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] sing with my mind. (14-15)

Glossaists interpret the Apostle here as saying that there are two kinds of praying and singing, one with the mind and the other without. More specifically, they claim that to “pray with my spirit” apart from the mind is legitimate and the biblical gift of tongues. Accordingly, Dr. Fee writes:

[The Corinthians’] error in understanding permit us to catch a glimpse of what otherwise would be unknown, namely, the Apostle’s own interior life in the Spirit. . . . [W]hat we learn here is that his “spirituality” included a continual life of praying and singing in the Spirit—in this case, with glossolalia. . . . [Here] we have especially the description of his own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit. 58

Likewise, Glossaist NT scholar Michael Green write:

Perhaps one of the areas of profit that we may need to be reminded of in an over-cerebral age is this: [praying in an incoherent tongue] allows the human spirit to pray, even when the mind is unfruitful because it cannot understand (1 Cor. 14:14). Many people pray in tongues while driving a car or washing up—their mind can be employed elsewhere. Clearly, therefore, tongues is a valuable gift for private edification. It can bring a profound sense of the presence of God, and lead, as a result, to a release from tension and worry, and a deepening of love and trust. As the Holy Spirit leads the believer in such prayer, there is often a deep sense of being in harmony with God. 59

There are several insurmountable problems with the idea that the Apostle is advocating a habit of mindless prayer. First, it violates the clear commands and instructions in Scripture, even from Jesus, of the need to have our mind engaged in any prayer that would be pleasing to God. The biblical commands regarding prayer will be discussed further below.

Secondly, the Apostle prefaces the passage by saying, “Anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says” (v. 13). We would ask again, if praying in a mindless, meaningless way is so valuable, why would the Apostle say this? It is because he knew that it would be better even for the tongue speaker to know the meaning of what they were praying, because as we noted above, there is no value in utterances that are not understood, not to the individual or others. 60

Thirdly, Glossaist too easily dismiss or intentionally ignore the significance of the Apostle’s statement that the person who prays “in a tongue” does it with “my spirit” (i.e. seat of human emotions), not the Holy Spirit. As mentioned above, the Apostle does not mention the Holy Spirit in all of 1 Corinthians 14, but rather the human spirit (cf. 14:2 and sec. A.1.a above). It would have been very easy for the Apostle to specify the involvement of the Holy Spirit here, but he intentionally does not. Accordingly, NT scholar Anthony Thiselton writes:

A disastrous move [in 1 Cor 14:14-15], however, is to confuse [pneuma] as a noncognitive or "spiritual" human capacity, with Spirit as the Holy Spirit of God. There are at least two different reasons. First, Pauline specialists generally
agree that Platonic or Idealist notions of the human spirit as a point of "divine contact" are alien to Paul and plainly alien to the explicit thrust of I Cor 2:10-12.

Second, to read this into 14:15 is to fall into the very trap to which the Corinthians and many today fall prey, namely, of associating the operation of the Holy Spirit more closely with noncognitive "spontaneous" phenomena than with a self-critical reflection upon the word of God as that which addresses the understanding and thereby transforms the heart (cf. 14:23-25). Contrary to his usually more judicious assessments Fee repeats this disastrous confusion explicitly in his commentary and in his two more recent volumes: "my S/spirit prays." 62

Fourth, Glossaist do not consider carefully enough how derogatory the Apostle is toward those who "pray in a tongue" when he says their "mind is unfruitful [akarpos: "unproductive, barren"]'). When would being "unfruitful" in prayer or singing or anything else be a good, Christian thing. On the contrary, it is a bad pagan thing.

Along these lines, Dr. Edgar remarks:
The tongues movement presumes that communication with the spiritual realm is more direct when it is apart from the mind. Such a concept, though found in various religions, is contrary to biblical Christianity. 63

As is often the case, nobody says it better (or harsher sometimes) than John Calvin, even if it was more than 400 years ago. Commenting on this very passage (1 Cor 14:14-15), Calvin expressed the universal conviction of the Christian Church for almost 1700 years when he wrote:
Let us take notice, that Paul reckons it a great fault if the mind is not occupied in prayer. And no wonder; for what else do we in prayer, but pour out our thoughts and desires before God? Farther, as prayer is the spiritual worship of God, what is more at variance with the nature of it, than that it should proceed merely from the lips, and not from the inmost soul? And these things [should] have been perfectly familiar to every mind, had not the devil besotted the world to such a degree, as to make men believe that they pray aright, when they merely make their lips move. 64

Likewise, in a treatise on how to pray, Martin Luther (1483-1546) reflected the historical view of prayer when he wrote regarding those who do not think about what they are praying: "When it is all over they do not know what they have done or what they talked about," 65 which describes "praying in a tongue" very well. Luther went on to write:
But, praise God, it is now clear to me [although apparently not to many today] that a person who forgets [or doesn't even know] what he has said has not prayed well. In a good prayer one fully remembers [and understands] every word and thought from the beginning to the end of the prayer. 66

More recently, other commentators on this passage have agreed with our concerns. The highly respected British NT scholar C. K. Barrett writes concerning the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:15:
The upshot of the matter is that if I pray in a tongue, part, and that a most significant part, of my nature remains out of action. This is not good for me, and it is not good for the community I ought to serve. 67

Likewise, Dr. MacArthur writes that the answer to the Apostle's question, "What should I do?" in 14:15 is that:
there is no place for mindless ecstatic prayer. Praying and singing with the spirit must be accompanied by praying and singing with the mind also. It is obvious that edification cannot exist apart from the mind. Spirituality involves
more than the mind, but it never excludes the mind (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:23; Col. 3:10).  

Along the same lines, NT scholar Leon Morris interprets this passage as follows:

Anyone who prays in a tongue is not using his mind (nous). The Christian life is considerably more than a mental exercise, but anyone whose mind is unfruitful is not being true to his Christian calling. This passage is very important for its insistence on the rightful place of the intellect. Notice that this is secured without any diminution of spiritual fervour. Paul is not arguing for a barren intellectualism.

There is a place for the enthusiasm so strikingly exemplified in the use of 'tongues'. But it must be allied to the use of the mind, and this 'tongues' by itself does not provide. Paul singles out two activities specially appropriate in public worship: prayer and singing. Both must be done intelligently, with the mind. . . . Clearly Paul is not looking for unintelligible [mindless] prayers. . . .

Perhaps the best synopsis of what the Apostle is teaching here is found in Richard Oster’s commentary:

In 14:14-15 Paul enters into specific instruction which, in my judgment, makes the most sense when viewed against the backdrop of residual pagan thinking among certain converts. Specifically, Paul’s corrective use of the mind/spirit dichotomy seemingly assumes a situation where the tongue speakers are relying only on their “spiritual” component to the neglect of their rational self. Even though there is no such radical antithesis between mind and spirit in Pauline anthropology, there is apparently such in the thinking and practice of these Corinthian saints. Accordingly, Paul’s observation about the unfruitfulness of the mind of the Corinthian tongue speakers during their prayers-in-tongues implies an “irrational” dimension to their spirituality and piety that Paul finds unacceptable. . . .

This type of “irrational” focus in communion with the divine was well known in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish materials of antiquity. E. R. Dodd’s classic work entitled The Greeks and the Irrational, unfortunately neglected by most interpreters of 1 Cor 14, shows how widespread and deeply rooted the notion of the “irrational” was in the pagan concepts of prophecy, enthusiasm, and oracular possession. This is the very reason why pagan visitors to the [Corinthian] worship service can so readily interpret this aberrant tongue speaking in light of the pagan oracular experiences and presume a deity is also in the midst of these tongue speakers in the church of God.

Finally, a major mistake Glossaist make here is to assume that the Apostle is advocating two kinds of prayer and singing, one which only engages the human “spirit” and consequently also, a type of praying and singing that only engages the mind. There are obviously several problems with this. First, Glossaist must be consistent, and if they are going to claim the Apostle is advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the “spirit” and not the mind, then they must also admit that he is equally advocating a type of prayer or singing that only engages the intellect, and not the affections. Not surprisingly, Glossaists never suggest an example of only praying or singing with the understanding and not our emotions and desires that is equally legitimate.

What kind of worship would that be, and would the Apostle encourage it? Obviously, it is hard to even conceive of authentic Christian worship that excludes the spirit of a person, and even if we could conceive of it, we certainly wouldn’t advocate it. The same is true of the idea that authentic Christian praying or singing could exclude the mind. As usual, Charismaticism is separating what God has joined together.

Nonetheless, the Apostle recognizes that one could pray and sing with only the “spirit” which would seem to be doing so with merely a great deal of subconscious emotion and very little conscious understanding. Which, of course, describes both
what was occurring in the pagan mystery religion temples of the time and in the modern and unbiblical version of the gift of tongues. However, and contrary to the claims of Glossaists, the Apostle says that praying or singing with only the human spirit is “unfruitful” (14:14).

If this is the case, then what kind of prayer and singing is the Apostle advocating in 1 Corinthians 14:15? It is obvious to anyone except those needing to find biblical support for their pagan prayer and worship practices. The Apostle writes:

So what shall I do [because praying and singing with only with my spirit is unfruitful]? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also [at the same time] sing with my mind. (14-15)

We are rather perplexed again as we are reminded of Dr. Fee’s interpretation that:

[Here] we have especially the description of his [the Apostle’s] own prayer life in 1 Cor 14:14-15, that it is of two kinds: praying [only] with his mind [or] praying [only] with his S/spirit.  

Again, Dr. Fee offers no support or examples of why the Apostle would ever only pray with his mind and not his spirit.

Contrary to Glossaism, the Apostle is describing the only legitimate way for a Christian to pray, which is with both the spirit (affections, emotions, and desires) and the mind (reason, thinking, understanding) simultaneously, just as is described throughout the rest of the Bible. He is describing what we have described elsewhere as whole-hearted worship, and singing or praying with only the spirit is surely a violation of the King’s encouragement to worship “in spirit and in truth” (cf. John 4:21-24).

Accordingly, Dr. Thiselton writes in his detailed commentary of the Greek text:

Paul argues equally against uncritical "enthusiasm," uncritical "renewal" traditions, or uncritical mysticism on one side and against gnostics, theological theorists, or any who seek to intellectualize Christian faith into a mere belief system on the other. Christians are confronted not by an either . . . or . . . but by a both . . . and . . .

Paul declares that being "spiritual," i.e., of the Holy Spirit, occurs "when the Holy Spirit [simultaneously] controls both the spirit and the mind."  

Additional scholarly support for the fact that the Apostle is advocating prayer and singing that simultaneously engages the human spirit and the mind is found in the authoritative Greek lexicon *BAGD* which interprets the Greek of the latter half of v. 15 as: “sing praise . . . in full possession of one's mental faculties.”

How then can any Christian find any encouragement here to pray or sing in an empty state of mind that the Apostle says is *akarpos*, useless and barren (1 Cor 14:14)? On the contrary, he essentially says, "I would do something better than mindlessly, emotionally, uselessly, and selfishly just pray or sing with my spirit like the pagans do, I will also pray and sing with my mind so I and others know what I’m praying and singing!"

**b) The Apostle Peter’s instruction to pray with our minds: 1 Pet 4:7**

The Apostle Peter agrees with the Apostle Paul on this point and speaks of the vital place of the mind in any Christian prayer when he writes, “be of sound judgment [sōphronēsate] and sober [nēpsate] spirit for the purpose of prayer” (1 Pet 4:7 NASB). The NCV renders it, “think clearly and control yourselves so you will be able to pray.” The NIV translates the Apostle as saying, “be clear-minded so that you can pray,” and he certainly didn’t mean “empty-minded” which describes a great deal of the half-hearted kind of prayer many are advocating today when they promote “praying in a tongue.”
Again, when we understand that the human “heart” contains our reason, desires, and emotions, we understand that it is not just a lack of emotional fervor that results in half-hearted prayer, but a neglect of our intellect as well. When we think particularly of the popular practice of “praying in a tongue,” it would seem to be an example of half-hearted prayer, and the Apostle Peter’s command would therefore clearly condemn it.

Those who claim the Apostle Paul is encouraging “praying in a tongue” in 1 Corinthians 14 must at least admit that its mindless nature violates the Apostle Peter’s command to “be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer” (1 Pet 4:7 NASB), and contradicts everything else the Bible says about prayer, as the conscious engagement of the Christian’s mind is always either clearly commanded or presupposed.

c) The King’s instruction not to “babble like pagans” when we pray: Matt 6:5-9

While the Apostle Peter’s instruction above is explicit, we would suggest that the King’s own instruction on prayer is implicit in advocating the place of the mind in prayer. For example, we read in Luke:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say [using your mind, of course]: "'Father, hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come. . ." (Luke 11:1-2).

As we noted elsewhere in KOG:

When Jesus taught the disciples how to communicate with God, He told them to use logically based propositional statements like, “Our Father who is in Heaven” (Matt 6:9) which require logical and reasonable thought to formulate, understand, and express. 76

It is obvious that when the King was praying here, it was not in a “tongue” and when His disciples specifically asked Him to teach them how to pray He did not advocate such a practice. Accordingly, there is no mention of the King ever praying in an obscure tongue, including the very intimate and emotional prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, and His “high priestly prayer” recorded in John 17. His prayers in both these cases were from God to God. It would seem if there was ever a time for the “super prayer language” that is claimed in Glossaism to be demonstrated, these events would have provided the opportunity to validate such a thing. God the Son spoke naturally to God the Father and instructed us to do the same, not in the obscure utterances that are being exalted today.

In fact, the King would seem to have condemned several practices particularly in Glossaism regarding prayer when He taught:

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many [polulologia: “utterances”]. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. “This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...” (Matt 6:5-9)

When the King speaks of “secret” prayer He obviously is not advocating a “private prayer language.” However, it would seem possible to apply His rebuke to
someone standing in a public assembly praying audibly in obscure gibberish just “to be seen by men” to many modern Glossaists.

The King’s command that “when you pray, do not keep on babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans” would also seem to have some relevance to our discussion of modern Glossaism. First, the Apostle Matthew’s use of such a rare word to reflect Christ’s meaning is very significant. Many assume that the King was merely referring to repetitive prayer such as practiced in Roman Catholicism by praying through the rosary. If this was so, other common Greek words could have been used by the Apostle to translate what Christ meant (e.g. palin: “again”; cf. 2 Cor 11:16; 13:2; “repeat” in NIV). However, Christ obviously meant to describe a kind of prayer that was much more than mere repetition, but an incoherent “babbling.”

This then leads to the second reason Christ’s condemnation of a “babbling” prayer applies to modern day Glossaism. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, praying in an incoherent “tongue” was commonly known to be a frequent practice in the Greek mystery religions when the King lived on the earth. We are not aware of any evidence that merely repetitive prayers were common in these religions, but we have considerable evidence that praying publicly in meaningless, “babbling,” gibberish was thought to be a more spiritual kind of prayer practiced in the pagan mystery religion temples. It seems quite reasonable then to interpret the King’s condemnation of “babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans” to refer to this very thing. Accordingly, the NLT reads, “don’t babble . . . as people of other religions do.”

The Greek battalogēsēte is a unique word and only used here in the NT. The NIV “babbling” suggests mindless and meaningless utterances and the authoritative Greek dictionary BAGD defines battalogēsēte as “speaking without the mind,” a rather identical description of the modern practice of “praying in a tongue.” Accordingly, the eminent NT scholar John Stott remarks concerning the meaning of battalogēsēte:

The word describes any and every prayer which is all words and no meaning, all lips and no mind or heart. Battalogia is explained in the same verse (7) as polulogia, ‘much speaking’, that is, a torrent of mechanical and mindless words.

It is agreed by most that “praying in a tongue” is indeed mindless as battalogēsēte suggests. In addition, it is admitted that tongue utterances are meaningless to the speaker, an aspect that is captured in the NCV translation of battalogēsēte as “saying things that mean nothing,” and the ESV and RSV which reads, “heap up empty phrases.” The NASB translates battalogēsēte as “meaningless repetition” which linguists around the world would confirm perfectly reflects the practice of “praying in a tongue.”

Accordingly, theology Professors Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis write:

Many approaches to meditation today under the influence of Hindu and Buddhist mysticism ask that a person’s mind be rid of all conceptual thought from any source whatever, including propositional revelation. That may be an appropriate way to identify with the impersonal, nonintelligent energy of the cosmos, but it is not an acceptable way to commune with the heavenly Father to whom Jesus asked us to pray without vain [empty] repetition.

Obviously the King is not condemning meaningful repetition in prayer as is exemplified by His own prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane and encouraged in His parable of the unjust judge and the widow (cf. Luke 18:1-8). In addition, Christ’s mention of the pagans praying with “many words” (polulogia) can just as well be translated “much utterance,” without the implication that the utterances have meaning as real words.

It is suggested here then that a legitimate translation of the King’s words would simply be, “When you pray, do not make meaningless and incoherent “babble” like the pagans do in their temples, for they think they will be heard because they do this a lot. But when you pray, do it in a meaningful, coherent way like ‘Our Father . . .’”
Accordingly, Dr. Stott remarks regarding on the King’s instruction, “when you pray, do not keep on babbling (battalogēsēte) like pagans”:

To sum up, what Jesus forbids his people is any kind of prayer with the mouth when the mind is not engaged. . . . Jesus intends our minds and hearts to be involved in what we are saying. Then prayer is seen in its true light—not as a meaningless repetition of words, nor as a means to our own glorification, but as a true communion with our heavenly Father. . . .

Thus Christian prayer is seen in contrast to its non-Christian alternatives. It is God-centered (concerned for God’s glory) in contrast to the self-centeredness of the Pharisees (preoccupied with their own glory). And it is intelligent (expressive of thoughtful dependence) in contrast to the mechanical incantations of the heathen.

Therefore when we come to God in prayer, we do not come hypocritically like play actors seeking the applause of men, nor mechanically like pagan babblers, whose mind is not in their mutterings, but thoughtfully, humbly and trustfully like little children to their father.

While Dr. Stott does not specifically condemn “praying in a tongue,” one could hardly describe those who do, any better than those, “whose mind is not in their mutterings.”

It is clear that the King’s command to pray coherently with understandable content is clearly violated by “praying in a tongue” that is admittedly incoherent. It is not the content of the Lord’s Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan’s prayer, for surely the pagans desired many of the same things listed (e.g. daily bread, protection from evil, etc.) No, it was the method of the Lord’s Prayer that distinguished it from the pagan practice. Pagans prayed half-heartedly in mindless gibberish (battalogēsēte). The King told us to pray whole-heartedly in coherent, meaningful, natural speech which requires our mind.

One could hardly suggest a better description of the pagan “tongue” prayer than that of Gerd Theissen, Professor of New Testament Theology at the University of Heidelberg, who refers to it as “the language of the unconscious.” It would seem then that the practice of “praying in a tongue” resembles the ancient pagan practice and violates the King’s command because its practitioners: 1) admit that they do not understand what they are praying in a tongue, and 2) according to linguists, the prayer language consists of repeating cycles of the same meaningless syllables, and 3) It violates the King’s clear command to pray coherently and meaningfully in natural human language.

If some still doubt that the King’s words apply to praying in incoherent utterances, then it is suggested that they imagine themselves on “the Mount” that day, sitting in front of Him, when He spoke these words:

**When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans . . . Do not be like them [pagans] . . . This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father Who is in Heaven . . . (Matt 6:7-9)**

Now, imagine that immediately after personally hearing these words of the King, someone stood up in the crowd and audibly uttered a “prayer” in an incoherent “tongue.” Imagine further that afterwards the person explains to the crowd: ‘What He just said about not “babbling like pagans” really doesn’t include ‘praying in a tongue.’ Sure, it obviously resembles what the pagans do, but it can also be a spiritual gift from God, and in fact a special and even more spiritual way of communing with God that should be sought by all of God’s children.” Do you think the King would be nodding with approval? Neither do we think He approves of it today.

It is admitted that what is being suggested here is quite serious: praying in obscure gibberish is not just meaningless but sinful. It is also admitted that the King did not explicitly use the words “praying in a tongue” when he condemned “babbling like the pagans” and some may understandably object to the above interpretation. However, understanding the religious context of His statement, and
the popularity of “babbling” in a tongue in the Greek mystery religions, provides considerable support for our view. Nonetheless, the concepts are clearly related enough that one could ask why someone would even want to come close to something our Lord seemed so passionately against?

5) Why Did the Apostle Command that Tongues Not Be Forbidden?: 14:39

Finally, the Apostle says in verse 39: "Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues [glossais]” Again, because the Apostle is making a statement that clearly applies to the real gift and not the pagan utterances, he uses the Greek plural.

In what would seem to be the unlikelihood that such a gift would be granted and miraculously confirmed in this primarily Greek congregation, the Apostle does not want it banished. Which, as discussed in the previous chapter, is what some of the Corinthians may have been likely to do in order to rid the assembly of the pagan counterfeit. The Apostle’s idea was better. Make the counterfeiters mumble silently to themselves, and let the real thing miraculously happen if God ordains it so.

Along these lines, Calvin points out that when the Apostle addresses the rules for tongues speaking he prefaces his instruction with “If anyone speaks in a tongue . . .” (14:27), whereas there is no “if” regarding prophecy which implies that the Apostle expected and encouraged the latter, but not necessarily the former. Calvin further comments:

It is to be observed, however, that he does not command [tongues speaking], but merely permits; for the Church can, without any inconvenience, dispense with tongues, except in so far as they are helps to prophecy . . . . Paul makes this concession that he may not seem to deprive the assembly of believers of any gift of the Spirit. 89

We too would not forbid the manifestation of the authentic sign gift of miraculously speaking in a foreign human language. However, it simply does not seem to exist, as the modern phenomenon differs greatly from the authentic and biblical version, but mimics the pagan variety. And that can and should be forbidden.

6) A Paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 14:1–40

Based on all that has been discussed above, it may be helpful again to summarize our conclusions by offering the following paraphrase of certain sections of 1 Corinthians 14:

[vs. 1-5] Pursue the kind of others-edifying love that I have been describing along with eagerly desiring supernatural spiritual manifestations, especially prophecy which provides revelation from God. The reason you should desire prophecy is because when someone utters something in an unknown tongue, it does not benefit others in a loving way, only God knows what it is, and it resembles the “mysteries” spoken in pagan temples. But everyone who prophesies edifies the church in a way that demonstrates love, and therefore, a legitimate manifestation of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, he who speaks in meaningless gibberish only serves to selfishly puff up themselves, like the pagans do in their worship, and which, as I have already told you, is not how an authentic Christian spiritual gift works. It would be great if all of you miraculously spoke in human foreign languages you did not know, but it would be better if you prophesied because it is more edifying to others.

[vs. 6-12] And even if I miraculously spoke in a human foreign language, what good would it be if it did not contain some helpful content? You know that even musical instruments that make meaningless sounds are useless. So it is
with meaningless sounds in your assembly. If you utter something meaningless in the assembly, at best, you are merely speaking to the air, and you create an environment that makes people feel like they are in a foreign country where they do not belong. This is not good, and so because you are eager to experience spiritual things in your church, try to excel in those things which build up others, like meaningful speech, instead of meaningless utterances that don’t build up others.

[vs. 13-17] Because the meaningless type of tongues you are practicing does not help others, anyone wanting to do it should pray that God will also provide an interpretation so that others will benefit as well. Because if I simply pray, sing, or praise in a mindless, meaningless tongue, it is useless both for myself and others because neither I nor they understand what is being said. And again, this does not edify others.

I thank God that I use the authentic sign gift of miraculously speaking in human foreign languages more than all of you Corinthians combined. This is because my ministry is preaching the new revelation of the Gospel and this gift is a miraculous sign to unbelievers. But in the assembly of believers, I would rather speak five meaningful and understandable words that instruct others than ten thousand “words” in a meaningless tongue like that practiced in the pagan temples. Brothers, grow up, and abandon this idea that this tongues manifestation somehow makes you superior to others. It may in fact be evil. Understand that God said in the Old Testament that such a manifestation would actually be a sign of judgement, not blessing.

[vs. 22-23] The bottom line is that the authentic Christian gift of tongues is intended to be a miraculous sign to unbelievers of new divine revelation, not a sign of spirituality to believers as you are using it. Even still, it will not work in your congregation because its supernatural character is only revealed if there are people present who speak a number of different foreign languages as was the case at its first occurrence in Jerusalem on Pentecost. In fact, even if you used the authentic gift in your congregation, visiting unbelievers are just going to think it is the same thing they can hear at the pagan temple just down the street.

[vs. 26-38] Everything that occurs in the church service should be done in order to strengthen everyone. That is why if some people claim to have the gift of tongues, only a few, at the most three, should speak, one at time, and someone must then interpret. If it is not certain that someone with the gift of interpretation is present, then the person who thinks their utterance is from God should make no sound at all. Women are not to publicly speak in tongues, or otherwise, in the church assembly. All of this is because an assembly worshipping God will exhibit God-like characteristics such as order and peace, not the random and noisy chaos that is deemed to be spiritual in the pagan temples. If anybody thinks they are spiritually gifted but they do not follow these rules which are God’s command, they should be ignored by the assembly so that they feel ashamed and will stop their pagan practices.

[vs. 39-40] Therefore brothers, be eager to excel in gifts that edify others, like prophecy which consists of meaningful, others-edifying speech. And if the real gift of tongues is demonstrated to be present through supernatural interpretation then do not forbid its operation. But no matter what, the chaotic, noisy, and offensive environment observed in the pagan temples where everyone seems self-absorbed in uttering their meaningless gibberish has nothing to do with a church service God is leading.

B) The Misinterpretation of Some Scriptures Regarding Tongues
1) Is the Spirit’s Intercession the Gift of Tongues? Romans 8:26

Some have claimed that there is a reference to a mindless praying in a tongue in Romans 8 when the Apostle writes:

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 as sons, the redemption of our bodies . . .

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 with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. (Rom 8:22-27)

It is understandable that a prayer by the Holy Spirit which we do not understand may resemble the modern idea of praying in a mindless, incoherent tongue. Accordingly, Dr. Fee writes:

The present sentences [Rom 8:23-7], in fact, correspond remarkably with what Paul elsewhere calls "praying with/in the Spirit" (I Cor 14:14-15; Eph 6:18). These correspondences occur at two crucial points: (a) the Spirit is the subject of the verb "interceding," that is, the Spirit himself is seen as praying from within us and (b) the persons involved do not understand what the Spirit is saying—or not saying, as the case may be.  

As noted above, Dr. Fee is mistakenly ignoring the Apostle's explicit statement that "praying in a tongue" is merely done with the human spirit (i.e. emotions) and not by the Holy Spirit. While Dr. Fee wishes to continually insert a mention of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians 14, the Apostle never does, always intentionally speaking of the human seat of emotion in regards to speaking in an unknown tongue (cf. 14:2, 14, 15, 32).

As for the general notion that the Apostle is describing the practice of "praying in a tongue" in Romans 8, there are several problems. First of all, it is clear that not all Christians were to have the gift of tongues, even in the early church (cf. 1 Cor 12:14-20, 28-31). If the Apostle were speaking of the gift of tongues in this passage then multitudes of believers would be excluded from the Spirit’s intercession which the Apostle promises here. On the contrary, the promise of the Spirit’s intercession is true for every Christian without condition, especially the requirement for a gift of tongues. Shame again on Glossaists for claiming such a thing. And it would appear that Glossaist exegetes themselves are rather ashamed of such a claim, as well, because to our knowledge, they never address the ramifications of their elitist claim that the blessing of the Spirit's intercession that the Apostle promised all Christians here, is only for them.

Secondly, there is no mention of the gift of tongues in this verse, even though it would have been very likely that the Apostle would have used the term if he thought the promise was applicable for the gift.

Thirdly, the prayer being described here is inaudible to even the person being prayed for. Certainly the whole creation . . . groaning is silent, for we do not audibly hear it making any such noises. Also, the Apostle does not say these groans or prayers are coming from us, but rather, both of them belong to, and come from, the Holy Spirit, something that could obviously be accomplished silently and without our knowing it. According to the Apostle here, we are not only unaware of what the Spirit is praying, but that we are not even aware that He is praying at all. We are completely oblivious to this constant interaction between and within the Godhead on our behalf. There is no doubt that the fact that the Spirit keeps the Godhead abreast of our spiritual condition and intercedes for the saints is a spiritual blessing. But whatever benefits we receive from this ministry are unknown to us.
Interpretation of 1 Cor 14

In fact, this is precisely what the Greek means. Accordingly, NT scholar Douglas Moo points out that the Greek word *alalētois* translated in the NIV as "*that words cannot express*":

means, as its etymology implies, "unspoken," "wordless" . . . and this makes it almost impossible to identify the "groans" with glossolalia, for tongues, of course, are verbalized. . . . [I]t is preferable to understand these "groans" as the Spirit's own "language of prayer," a ministry of intercession that takes place in our hearts (cf. v. 27) in a manner imperceptible to us. 94

Finally, notice that the Apostle is implying our point that humans cannot meaningfully pray without knowing what they are praying. When "we do not know what we ought to pray for" (8:26), we cannot pray because any meaningful prayer by Christians must contain cognitive, rational content. In such instances in which we cannot rationally and meaningfully pray, the Holy Spirit has to pray for us, because "the mind of the Spirit" knows God’s will and what to pray for, even if our mind does not. And let us notice that even the Spirit prays with His mind!

2) Is “Praying in the Spirit” the Gift of Tongues? Jude 1:20 & Ephesians 6:18

_**Glossaists** _suggest that biblical references to “praying in the Spirit” especially refer to praying in an incoherent tongue. For example, we read in Jude: “**But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit**” (1:20). The _**Glossaist** _theologian J. Rodman Williams claims in the _Evangelical Dictionary of Theology _that, “The focus here is also on personal edification through tongues.” 95

It is obvious that if _**Glossaists** _wish to insist that this verse has any reference at all to a supposed gift of praying in a tongue for self edification, they have several difficult questions to answer. First of all, they are again implying that only those with their “gift” could obey this verse. The gift of tongues was a spiritual gift, not an ability shared by everyone (cf. 1 Cor 12:30) and it would be absurd to suggest that Jude is commanding its use here. Additionally, it is again a case of un-Christian arrogance to suggest that _**Glossaists** _praying in an incoherent tongue are the only ones who, “pray in the Holy Spirit.”

Along these lines, it is instructive to look at another reference to “praying in the Spirit.” In Ephesians 6:18 we read: “**And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.**” Not surprisingly, Dr. Fee writes:

There is every good reason to think that Paul intends this phrase precisely as he has used it elsewhere especially in 1 Cor 14:14-15 (cf. Rom 8:26-27)-to refer specifically to that form of prayer in which the Spirit assumes a special role in the praying, especially, though probably not exclusively, praying in tongues. . . . If this more specific "praying in the Spirit" is in view, then one must also be prepared to enlarge one’s understanding of the nature of such praying; it is not only speaking mysteries to God, or praise and blessing God, or "inarticulate groanings" in times of present weakness, but a way of engaging the enemy in the ongoing conflict. 96

If this is also referring to praying in a tongue than we should all be doing it constantly, “**on all occasions.**” However, it is clear that to “**pray in the Spirit**” here has nothing to do with a mindless prayer in a meaningless tongue. This is a prayer in which we make “**requests,**” and pray “**for all the saints,**” both of which require that we understand what we are praying. In addition, the Apostle’s admonition that we need to “**be alert**” while we "**pray in the Spirit**" teaches us that to pray in a mindless tongue is actually the opposite of “praying in the Spirit.” Accordingly, with all the tongue praying that _**Glossaists** _do, have we seen proof that they are significantly more effective in “engaging the enemy” in spiritual warfare
than other Christians as Dr. Fee claims? On the contrary, we believe the devil merely laughs at such prayers.

3) Did the King Invite Us to Ask for the Gift of Tongues? Luke 11:13

In His teaching about prayer in Luke 11, the King said:

So I say to you: 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; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. 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! (9-13)

Unfortunately, some have argued using this passage that if a Christian asks God for the gift of tongues and they begin to speak in a tongue, then surely it has come from God. How dare modern Glossaists reduce such an amazing promise to the pathetic idea of obtaining the learned ability to pray in meaningless gibberish. And once again, they are at odds with almost 1700 years of Christian history when they read their relatively recent phenomenon into Christ’s promise. Why wouldn’t we think of much better things that come with the Holy Spirit which are clearly taught in Scripture instead of something meaningless and not clearly taught in Scripture at all. Accordingly, we suggest Christ’s promise concerns such things as salvation (cf. John 3:3-8), preservation (cf. Eph 1:13-14), empowerment (cf. Acts 1:8), and legitimate spiritual gifts for edifying others (cf. 1 Cor 12:7).

Extras & Endnotes

A Devotion to Dad

Our Father, we thank you that it truly is your desire to relate to us in prayer and strengthen us spiritually. And we thank you for the biblical means you have provided for these things as exampled by our first century brothers and sisters: “They devoted themselves to the Apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to [coherent, corporate] prayer” (Acts 2:42). Let us devote ourselves to the same and lead others to do so as well, and never allow cheap substitutes for real spiritual edification to distract us.

Gauging Your Grasp

1) Why do we claim the Apostle says that Glossaists speak to God (1 Corinthians 14:2)? What reasons do we give for this interpretation? Do you agree? Why or why not?

2) Why is the Glossaist’s interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:2 both divisive and demeaning to the rest of the Body of Christ?
3) What is our interpretation of the Apostle’s statement that “he who speaks in a tongue edifies himself”? What are our reasons for doing so. Do you agree? Why or why not?

4) What is our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:14-15? Do you agree? Why or why not?

5) Why do we claim that biblical references to “praying in the Spirit” (cf. Jude 1:20; Ephesians 6:18) do not include the modern version of tongues. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**Recommended Reading**

- H. Wayne House, “Tongues and the Mystery Religions at Corinth,” *BSac* 140, [1983]


**Publications & Particulars**


2 It would not seem best to automatically interpret λαλῶν at 14:2 as “speaking” which would imply intelligible words. Obviously, that is not what is happening here, because “no one understands” the unintelligible sounds being made by the one uttering something in a tongue. Accordingly, William Mounce notes that the Greek word here can mean “to give forth sounds or tones.” (*Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006], 673).

3 For further discussion of the meaning of glosse in 1 Corinthians 14 see section 3.17.F.2.

4 Although only verse 2 will be discussed here in detail, the discussion regarding the reference to God is intended to apply to verse 28 as well.

Dr. MacArthur attempts to alleviate the difficulty of the reference in 14:2 by stating:

I believe a better translation is “to a god.” The Greek has no definite article, and such anarthrous constructions usually are translated with an indefinite article. (*1 Corinthians* in *MacArthur’s New Testament Commentary*, Electronic Edition STEP Files CD-ROM [Hiawatha, IA: Parsons Technology, 1997])

No doubt for some this is a tempting argument and would easily explain a lot. And the Greek word here theo is translated as “god” small “g” several times in the NT. However, there are several problems with the idea. First of all, the context of the use of theo is a far more reliable guide to its translation than the inconsistent rule of Greek grammar that Dr. MacArthur cites. And with the context here, it would not seem possible to confidently choose “god” over “God” or vice versa.

But more importantly is the Apostle’s almost identical statement in verse 28 that “if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.” Here the definite article does precede theo and according to Dr. MacArthur’s suggestion, the Apostle is talking about “the God” here, and he would seem to agree (cf. *1 Corinthians* at 1 Cor 14:28).

So although it may be tempting to suggest otherwise, it is most likely that in both cases the Apostle means the tongue speaker is speaking to “the God” not “a god”.
Accordingly, Dr. Edgar writes:

I Corinthians 14:2 does not concern speaking to God in prayer or praise. The verse itself states the situation. The statement introduced by "for," gar, "for no man understands," gives the reason for the preceding statement, "he speaks . . . unto God." The reason he speaks to God is not because he is in prayer but because no one understands. The "speaking unto God" is equivalent to "only God understands." (Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Resources, 1996], 174.

"God" is not in the Greek text of 14:16 but unfortunately the NIV, NLT, CEV, NCV, TEV, JB, PME, NEB all insert it causing the unnecessary impression that the Apostle is talking about something other than the incoherent utterance produced by the mindless prayer he is referring to.

Dr. Fee’s translation is even worse ("If you are praising God by the Spirit") inserting both "God" and the Holy Spirit, neither of which are in the Greek text (The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987], 667). The more literal English translations (i.e., NASB, ESV, RSV, KJV, NKJV) correctly refrain from adding “God” to the text here in 14:16, and none of them follow Dr. Fee’s insertion of the Holy Spirit.

Fee, 1 Corinthians, 577-578 (italics in the original).

Ibid., 656.

For further discussion of the meaning of “mysteries” here see section 3.17.E.2-3.

The Pentecostal Dr. Fee, of course, insists that pneuma here refers to the Holy Spirit. His argument, based on a rule of Greek grammar regarding the complex and often uncertain subject of definite articles is unconvincing, and even he admits the rule is not consistent in the NT (1 Corinthians, 578, n. 43). Additionally, Dr. Fee ignores the contextual evidence provided by verses 14 and 15 as demonstrated above, which is surely a better guide.

Elsewhere, Dr. Fee claims:

All of this is to say that the small case "spiritual" probably should be eliminated from our vocabulary, when it comes to this word in the Pauline corpus. (God’s Empowering Presence [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994], 32)

On the contrary, as noted here, the Apostle obviously and often distinguished between the human spirit [i.e. seat of emotions] and the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Dr. Thiselton wrongly claims that the major reason we would interpret pneuma here as the person’s spirit is because “Many commentators before the 1950’s were unduly influenced by a view of human personhood dominated by idealist or Cartesian dualism.” (1086). Nonsense. Even he admits that pneuma must be interpreted as the human spirit a few verses later because of the context, and this is precisely what we are basing our view on as well.

For further discussion of what the Apostle meant by the human “spirit” see section 2.14.D.3.

As the NIDNTT notes, references to the human spirit “occurs nearly 40 times,” in the NT (New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT), Colin Brown, ed., 4 vols., [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986], III:693). Although instead of seeing it as the emotional, affectional aspect of a human, it is defined here as “man in so far as he belongs to the spiritual realm and interacts with the spiritual realm.” (Ibid.).

For a fuller discussion of 1 Cor 14:14-16 and a refutation of the idea that by “his spirit” (1 Cor 14:2) or “my spirit” (1 Cor 14:14-16) the Apostle means the Holy Spirit, or a spiritual gift, see section 3.18.A.4.

See a rather complete listing of the variety of meanings for *pneuma* in Vine’s, p. 593.

Ibid.

Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1 Cor 14:2; online at cCEL.org. Although as discussed in section 3.18.B.4, Hodge believed these were references to the Holy Spirit.

For example, the NIV at Matthew 12:36 translates *argos* as “careless.” To the contrary, Greek scholar John Nolland writes: “In the present context ‘careless’ or ‘thoughtless’ have also been suggested, but there seems to be no evidence of such a meaning for [argos].” (*The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 507.


William Mounce defines *argos* as: “unprofitable, hollow, or by impl., injurious.” (1096).


For discussion of other Scriptures that are claimed to mention praying in a tongue see discussion below under section B.


Edgar, 179.


Edgar, 170.


“Common” is added to the English text of 12:7, as it does not appear in the Greek. However, the addition is understandable considering the nature of spiritual gifts in general, and the immediate context of the church as an interdependent body. Not even Dr. Fee questions this interpretation. (cf. *1 Corinthians*, 584, 589).


Some have found support for the notion that there are gifts not designed for public edification at 14:12 where the NIV has the Apostle saying, “Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts [*pneumatikon*], try to excel in gifts that build up the church.” Such a translation gives the impression that there could be authentic spiritual gifts that do not edify the Church.

Unfortunately, this is an example of the error pointed out in the previous chapter concerning those who automatically translate *pneumatikon* (spiritual things) as authentic spiritual gifts (*charismata*). (see sec. 3.17.F.1) Unfortunately, the NIV inserts the word “gifts” twice, even though the Greek word for “gifts,” *charisma*, does not occur here.

The RSV is the most helpful translation here rendering the Greek: “since you are eager for manifestations [not necessarily gifts] of the Spirit [*pneumaton*], strive to excel in building up the church.” So, essentially what the Apostle is simply saying to the
Corinthians is that “Since you are so eager for spiritual manifestations, pursue the spiritual manifestations that edify the church (like prophecy) instead of the ones that puff yourselves up (like the pagan practice of praying in a tongue).” Again, the Apostle cannot conceive of an authentic spiritual gift that does not serve to build up others, like speaking in an incoherent “tongue.”

We might question how the authentic gift of speaking in real human foreign languages was edifying to the early church. It has already been pointed out that it authenticated divine revelation and could even contain it when interpreted (cf. 1 Cor 14:5). Dillow adds also that “tongues edified the early church by preventing the future establishment of a Jewish church versus a Samaritan church versus a Gentile church.” (35). The giving of the gift to the Jews in Acts 2, to the Samaritans in Acts 8, to the Gentiles in Acts 10, and to followers of John the Baptist in Acts 19, all served to unify these groups and underscore the fact that God was dealing with all peoples in one way so that now “Salvation is found in no one else (but Jesus Christ), for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Calvin, at 1 Cor. 14:4.

Reference unavailable.

However, it is not only Glossaist teachers who contradict themselves on the nature of spiritual gifts. For example, the respected NT scholar C. K. Barrett recognizes that in 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle clearly teaches that: “No member has his gift for his own private use; all are intended for the common good.” (The First Epistle to the Corinthians (BNTC) [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000], 284). Unfortunately, however, he apparently contradicts himself, as do many commentators today, when he says concerning 1 Corinthians 14:4-5: “speaking with tongues is . . . a gift from God by which you may . . . be individually built up” (Ibid., 316).

The venerable G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) would seem to make the same mistake. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 12:7 he says:

[T]he gift is bestowed upon the individual, not for the perfecting of his own life, but to profit withal [others]; the great fellowship is there seen. Whatever gift is bestowed upon me, upon you, it is bestowed upon us personally and individually in order that in its use we may profit withal [others]. (The Corinthian Letters of The Apostle [Revell, 1946], in loc.)

However, he later seems to contradict himself when he writes:

If used in public the gift of tongues demands interpretation. . . . [I]f interpretation is not there, the gift is not to be exercised in the presence of others, but is to be exercised when the recipient is alone with God [making it impossible to be edifying to others]. (Ibid., 112)

The same contradiction can be found more recently in Dr. Thiselton, who at one point accepts the idea of a spiritual gift for self-centered “private prayer language” but at 1 Cor 12:7 writes:

To the primary criterion of pointing to the Lordship of Christ or Christlikeness (12:3) as a mark of being authentically activated by the Spirit, Paul now adds a second criterion: the Spirit is at work where the public manifestation serves the common advantage of others, and not merely self-affirmation, self-fulfillment, or individual status. The Spirit produces visible effects for the profit of all, not for self-glorification. If the latter is prominent, suspicion is invited. (936).


Carson, Spirit, 102, n. 89. (underlining added for emphasis, italics in the original).

For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see section 3.17.E.

For further discussion of the critical fact that not all references to the tongues phenomena in 1 Corinthians 14 refer to the real gift see section 3.17.B.2 and F.2.
For further discussion of the mindless half-hearted worship practiced in paganism and "Christian" emotionalism today see chapter 2.14.

J. I. Packer, Keep in Step With the Spirit (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1984), 209, 280, n. 18.

For further discussion of the importance of our mind in a relationship with God see especially chapter 2.10-2.14.

Quoted from section 2.11.F.


For further discussion of the distinction between half-hearted pagan worship and whole-hearted worship that is "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23) as the Father seeks see chapter 2.14.

Ibid., I:223.

For further discussion of alarming environments in which the modern version of tongues is practiced see section 3.19.B.3.


The Apostle’s reference to “the peace of God which transcends all understanding,” (Phil 4:7) could be taken as a rebuke of the peace that comes from proper moral and logical reasoning. On the contrary, we believe Dr. O’Brien is correct to understand the Apostle as referring to how wonderful this peace is, not its suprarationality:

Paul describes God’s peace by means of a participial expression that is capable of being understood in two ways: (1) his peace accomplishes more than any human forethought or scheming can achieve, and so is far more effective in removing anxiety than any reasoning power (NEBmg); or (2) the peace of God is completely beyond all power of human comprehension (cf. RSV, GNB, JB, NIV, Moffatt, and Phillips [PME]).

The Greek may be interpreted either way, and although both renderings make good sense, it has been argued that (1) is more in harmony with the context. Human reasoning results in continued doubt and anxiety; it cannot find a way out of the dilemma (cf. v. 6). God’s peace, by contrast, is effective in removing all disquietude. If, however, in explaining the nature of God’s peace Paul is focusing on its uniqueness rather than its relative superiority to human ingenuity, then (2) is the correct interpretation.

The participle [uperechousa], with the rendering ‘be far beyond, excel’, supports this. Further, [panta noun], which means ‘all understanding’ (or possibly ‘every thought’) rather than ‘all planning’ or ‘all cleverness, inventiveness’ leads to the same conclusion. Accordingly, Paul is telling his readers that God’s peace or salvation that stands guard over them is more wonderful than they can imagine. (Cf. Eph. 3:20, where God is invoked as the one who can do ‘immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine’.)

Although [uperechoi] is on occasion used in polemical contexts (2:3; 3:8?), there is no such polemic here—either against Paul’s enemies who had an inflated view of their own knowledge or by way of subtle rebuke to those Philippians who are thought to have wanted to surpass their fellow Christians. His point in using [uperechoi] at v. 7 is quite different as he seeks to encourage his Christian friends about the wonder of God’s peace that guards their lives. (The Epistle to the Philippians, NIGTC [Eerdmans, 1991], 496-7)

In addition, any suggestion that peace could come apart from an understanding of truth ignores the biblical concept of faith. For further discussion of faith see chapters 2.19-2.20 and for further commentary on Philippians 4:7 see section 3.28.E.4.

Ch. 3.18: Interpretation of 1 Cor 14


56 For further discussion on the relationship between the Apostle and the Corinthians and its impact on properly interpreting 1 Corinthians 14 see section 3.17.D.

57 For further discussion of the extreme rarity of the real gift of tongues in the early Church see section 3.16.B.7.


60 Dr. Fee recognizes that the critical need for mental understanding is the face-value meaning of 14:13 and comments:

[T]he contextual difficulties are considerable if the [text] is original and the intent is that the tongues-speaker should pray for the gift of interpretation for the benefit of his or her own understanding, a view espoused by Calvin 292, Grosheide 325-26, Morris 194, Ruef 150, Mare 273. Not only does this contradict vv. 2, 4, and 15, but it places a premium on the mind as the only means whereby one may be edified personally, which also contradicts the intent of vv. 2 and 4. (*Presence*, 228-29)

The fact that Dr. Fee’s strongest argument against the face value meaning is that the text of v. 13 is not original, again, exposes the weakness of his view.

61 For further comment on what we would claim is Gordon Fee’s erroneous approach of completely eliminating the idea of a human spirit from the NT, see endnote above under section A.1.a.

62 Thiselton, 1112-1113.


64 John Calvin, *Commentaries, in loc.*, online at ccel.org.


66 Ibid.

67 Barrett, 320.

68 MacArthur, *1 Corinthians, loc. cit.*

69 Morris, 190.


71 In addition to separating human understanding from human affections, *Charismaticism* separates the Holy Spirit from Scripture, as if He speaks apart from it, and they separate divine revelation from divine authentication, accepting claims to revelatory gifts without demanding miraculous authentication of those gifts.


73 For further discussion regarding what is necessary for God-pleasing worship and interaction with Him see section 2.14.A.

74 Thiselton, 1111, 1113.

75 Thiselton, 1111.

76 Quoted from *KOG* section 2.11.C.
77 For evidence that the modern version of tongues mimics the worship practice of the first century Greek mystery religions see section 3.17.E.


79 Dr. Edgar relates the consensus of the Greek lexicons on the meaning of battalogeo:
The word battalogeo does not occur in the Septuagint [Greek translation of OT] and occurs only in this passage in the New Testament. Arndt and Gingrich define it as "babble, to speak without thinking" (Lexicon, 137). Moulton and Milligan see a connection between battalogeo, battalogeo, and battalos, the nickname of Demosthenes who was so called "because of the torrent of words at his command, which made envious rivals call him "the gabbler" (Vocabulary, 107). Liddell and Scott refer to similar words, all meaning to stammer, and define battalogeo as "speak stammeringly, say the same thing over and over" (Lexicon, 311). Beare feels that Jesus' meaning in this passage is that the disciples are not to "babble meaningless sounds" ("Speaking with Tongues," Journal of Biblical Literature 83 [September 1974]: 229). Delling agrees that it means "babble" in this verse ("Battalogeo," TDNT, 1:597). Lampe defines the term as it was used shortly after New Testament times (Patristic Greek Lexicon, 294). One example is clearly speech apart from understanding (Damasus Tropbaea 2.4.4., which states, "me epistamenos alla battalogeon, not understanding, but babbling"). Another example from an early church father refers to unintelligible utterance (Gregory Nyssa). (Satisfied, 198-9)


81 Many linguists who have studied the modern phenomenon of "speaking in a tongue" have commented on the fact that its contents are made up of repeating cycles of identical syllables. The Encyclopedia of Religion concludes the following after describing extensive, world-wide research on the tongues phenomenon:
Whatever takes place in the nervous system during [a tongue utterance] causes the utterance to break down into phrases of equal length, provided we also include the pauses. That is, using a concept taken from music rather than linguistics, it causes the phrases to be divided into bars, each of which is accented on the first syllable, and it causes the bars to pulsate, to throb rythmically in a [repeating] sequence of consonant-vowel, consonant-vowel. The trance state is responsible for the haunting intonation of glossolalia; never varying, it rises to a peak at the end of the first and third of the unit of utterance and drops to a level much lower than that at the onset as it comes to a close. (Mircea Eliade ed., 16 vols., [NY, NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987], V:564).


83 Accordingly, Dr. Stott writes:
The familiar KJV rendering, 'Use not vain repetitions,' is therefore misleading, unless it is clear that the emphasis is on 'vain' rather than on 'repetitions.' Jesus cannot be prohibiting all repetition, for he repeated himself in prayer, notably in Gethsemane when 'he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words'. Perseverance and even importunity in prayer are commended by him also; rather is he condemning verbosity, especially in those who 'speak without thinking'. So RSV 'heap up empty phrases' is helpful. (Sermon, 143)

84 "Much speaking" is the literal translation of polulogia (used only here in the NT) given by Vine (591) and the Greek Dictionary of the New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance (Robert L. Thomas, ed. [Anaheim, CA: Foundation, 1998, 1559]). Although cognates of logos such as polulogia normally imply words with meaning, the Apostle implies in 1 Corinthians 14 that logoi may not contain cognitive meaning when he writes:

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 [logoi, seeming to imply that
one can speak *logoi* that is not intelligible] *with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.* (1 Co 14:7-9).

The Apostle recognizes that “words” (*logios*) may be spoken that are not intelligible or meaningful and his statement here regarding the incoherent tongue that the Corinthians are using has a striking resemblance to Christ’s words regarding pagan characteristics of prayer.

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85 Carl F. H. Henry adds regarding Christ’s instruction on prayer: “Whether addressing God or man, Jesus placed a premium on intelligibility. (*God, Revelation and Authority* (GRA), 6 Vols. [Waco, TX: Word, 1979], 4:489).

86 Stott, *Sermon*, 143-45; 151-2


88 For a great deal more discussion on the practice of praying in an obscure tongue in the Greek mystery religions of the 1st and 2nd centuries see section 3.17.E.

89 Calvin, *Commentaries, in loc.*

90 Dr. Thiselton supports the idea that the Apostle is referring to the gift of tongues in Romans 8:22-27 (985), as does Turner (*The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998], 233-4), and Spittler in his entry to the *ISBE* on “Tongues,” although he gives no evidence for it (4:603).


92 Dr. Fee attempts to get around this by claiming that the inaudible groans of Creation described in v. 22 have nothing to do with the groans of the Spirit in v. 23 and that rather we should go to 2 Corinthians 5:2-3 where the Apostle speaks of what may be audible groans (*Presence*, 579, n. 320). Once again, a great biblical exegete is breaking the rules that he has taught to others for decades, merely to find support for his position.

93 It is the very imperceptibility of the Spirit’s intercession that makes the following from Dr. Fee rather meaningless:

> [T]here is no other known phenomenon, either in Paul or the early church, apart from the prayer in the Spirit described in I Corinthians 14, that even remotely resembles what the Apostle now describes in such a matter-of-fact way. (*Presence*, 584)

And we should expect no description of this phenomena occurring in the life of the Church because it happens continuously without our knowing it.

